Narrating Self and China

Women's Autobiography in Early Twentieth Century China

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Dedication

To my supervisor, Denise Gimpel, whose generous support and ceaseless encouragement made sure that this project saw the light of day.

Contents

Abstract

The present dissertation investigates three self-narratives written by Chinese women autobiographers in the first half of the twentieth century: Chen Hengzhe's *Autobiography of a Young Chinese Girl*, Yang Buwei's *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman*, and Ling Shuhua's *Ancient Melodies*. Written with foreign audience in mind, these narratives provide a range of Chinese female images aiming to contest the predominant Western stereotypes about China and its people. Therefore the main argument of this study is that these women writers adopted the roles of cultural interpreters, which allowed them to position themselves as authoritative and representative voices and, at the same time, rejuvenate China's image in the global arena.

Scholarship in modern Chinese literature has already approached these texts from the perspectives of genre, gender, and translation studies providing many valuable insights into the questions of female subjectivity, autonomy and literary activity. This dissertation, however, adopts a new approach in that it applies various aspects of narrative theory in order to examine the autobiographies in question as spaces of intercultural communication (I apply Baker's term of narrative framing, Abbot's approach to narrative as a combination of a story and narrative discourse, and Fisher's paradigm of narration as a way of human communication).

Encouraged to write their life narratives by their foreign friends, these Chinese women writers enthusiastically responded to this call by taking authority into their hands and describing themselves and China on their own terms. Chen Hengzhe did so from the position of the woman scholar who, as a historian, possessed an ability to view and judge Sino-Western interactions from a larger perspective. Yang Buwei interpreted China for the West from the perspective of a "typical" Chinese woman with a quite atypical claim to have unique insights into both cultures. Finally, Ling Shuhua adopted the role of the woman artist who, as a true connoisseur of Chinese culture, had the authority to explain the beauty of its manifestations for the Western reader. The common feature of these women's self-narratives is that they establish human connections across country boundaries by transmitting ideas and images, thus creating a meaningful dialogue between cultures. To highlight these issues this study operates with such essential key concepts as narrative frames, images, representations, power/knowledge relationship, space and cross-cultural communication.

Resumé

Mit studie undersøger tre selv-narrativer skrevet af kinesiske kvindelige selvbiografiforfattere fra den første halvdel af den tyvende århundrede. Disse er Chen Hengzhes *Autobiography of a Young Chinese Girl*, Yang Buweis *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman* samt Ling Shuhuas *Ancient Melodies*. Disse narrativer, skrevet for udenlandsk publikum, bidrager med en hel række af tekstuelle repræsentationer (images) af kinesiske kvinder og har til formål at modsætte de dominerende stereotyper om Kina og dets folk i Vesten. Derfor er hovedformålet med dette studie, at demonstrere hvordan disse kvindelige forfattere tog rollen som kulturelle formidlere, rollen som gjorde det muligt for dem at positionere sig selv som stærke og repræsentative stemmer, og samtidigt at antyde deres autoritet til at ændre Kinas omdømme på verdensplanen.

Den moderne akademiske forskning af den kinesiske litteratur har allerede bidraget med genre-, køn-, og oversættelsesstudiernes tilgangsvinkel til disse tekster og suppleret med mange værdifulde kommentarer omkring den kvindelige subjektivitet, selvstændighed og literære aktivitet. Dette studie tager imidlertid en ny tilgang til selvbiografi. Jeg undersøger de udvalgte selvbiografiske tekster som rum for den tværkulturelle kommunikation ved at anvende nogle aspekter tilhørende den narrative teori (for eksempel Bakers ”narrative framing,” Abbots tilgang til narrativ som en kombination af en fortælling og narrative diskurs samt Fishers paradigme der beskriver narrativ som en måde mennesker kommunikerer på).

Disse kinesiske kvindelige forfattere, opfordret til at skrive deres egne livshistorier af deres udenlandske venner, reagerede med en entusiastisk og selvbevidst forsøg på at beskrive dem selv og Kina egenhændigt. Chen Hengzhe gør det ved at positionere sig selv som en kvindelig historiker, der brugte sin indflydelse og uddannelse til at fortolke Kina for Vesten. Yang Buwei beskriver sig selv som en ”typisk” kinesisk kvinde, som ikke desto mindre har indsigt og viden om både Kina og Vesten og kan derfor positionere sig selv som en formidler mellem begge verdensdele. Ling Shuhua ser sig selv som kvindelig kunstner, en ægte kender af de kinesiske kunstformer, som er i stand til at forklare skønheden af hendes lands kultur til hendes vestlige læser. Tilsammen, har disse selv-narrative et fælles træk idet de formår at skabe et fundament for menneskelige kommunikation tværs landsgrænser. Denne kommunikation afhjælper ideudvekslingen og fortolkningen af de tekstuelle repræsentationer og i sidste ende fremkalder en meningsfuld dialog imellem kulturer. For at belyse disse problemstillinger, dette studie opererer med de essentielle koncepter såsom narrative frames, images, repræsentationer, magt/viden forhold, rum og tværkulturel kommunikation.

Notes on conventions

1. The Pinyin system of transcription has been used throughout, except in quotations from sources using other systems and in names familiar to readers of English in other spellings such as “Yangtze.”
2. Chinese characters and dates are provided for terms and names the first time they are mentioned.
3. Chinese names are generally written with the family name first, except in cases where the opposite is standard (i.e., Western-style names like “Janet Ng”).
4. Full names are given for authors with the same last name in places where ambiguity arises.

Introduction

A Theoretical Outline

The first half of the 20th century witnessed an unusual literary phenomenon – a few Chinese women writers, Chen Hengzhe 陈衡哲 (1890-1976), Yang Buwei 杨步伟 (1889-1981) and Ling Shuhua 凌叔华 (1900-1990), chose to make stories about their lives accessible to a Western audience by writing their autobiographies in English. The texts in question are Chen's *Autobiography of a Chinese Young Girl* (1935), Yang's *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman* (1947), and Ling's *Ancient Melodies* (1953). Not only did these women write in a language foreign to them, they also employed the literary genre of autobiography (*zizhuan* 自传) (with the exception of the last text which does not openly declare its affiliation with this genre) that was practically unknown in China prior to the turn of the 20th century. That Chinese women engaged themselves in writing openly about their lives in English was unprecedented in China. Unprecedented, however, does not mean unexpected. The period when these women were born and came of age was characterized by the strong influence of Western ideas upon the new generation of Chinese youth. These foreign ideas unsettled gender boundaries and self-perceptions unleashing a wave of female creativity. One of the formats that such creativity was expressed through was women's personal writings about their lives.

This dissertation will view these three examples of early female autobiography in China as an expression of a determined female action to position themselves as authoritative female voices (the male voice was usually the only one heard) that could represent their nation. Aiming at investigating what roles Chinese women of the early 20th century envisaged for themselves in their life-stories, this search encompasses reflections on the availability of the roles and images for women, the appropriation of such a new mode of self-expression in China as self-declared autobiography, the dialogical form of communication between author and reader, and the general applicability of life-storytelling method for defining the personal "self."

Furthermore, this group of women will be viewed as interpreters or even cultural ambassadors of China for foreign readers. Although China had been interpreted many times before them, the fact that such interpretations had mainly been provided by foreigners followed by male Chinese presents us with biased images regarding the realities of Chinese traditions and customs.

Such misrepresentations created by different groups who considered themselves experts on China invaded not only Western minds but exerted a great influence on the Chinese as well. It is therefore essential to study the way how Chinese pictured themselves and what they told the world about China and its culture. The historical circumstances of the 1930s, the time when the first of these autobiographies was written, proved to be a period that provided historical conditions and literary formats that could be used for interpreting China. Feeling ethical responsibility for helping China at the time when its world position was so weak and unstable, and enjoying help and encouragement from their friends, Chinese women writers took the initiative to explain what China and its people were like. Hence, another objective of this dissertation is to investigate how life-stories could be used and constructed in order to improve China's image in the West which certainly needed improving or, at least, it required sophistication.

Since the earliest contacts between West and East, Westerners, on the basis of what they heard about China or what they saw in China when visiting it, formulated their own perceptions of it. In each period these perceptions changed according to the predominating values and norms in Western society. The initial fascination Western travelers felt at the sight of Chinese riches and marvels and which was conveyed to their fellow countrymen contributed to the largely positive evaluation of a far-away civilization. The nineteenth century missionary push into China and the industrial revolution in the West changed this positive view allowing for growing superior attitudes of Western countries towards the less developed ones, and with it growing negative views of China and its people. Such changes of perceptions reflect what French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) would call the power/knowledge (*pouvoir/savoir*) relationship. Basically, his argument rests in the assertion that those who are in a position of power can use it to promote their own interests, exercise their power and constitute the "truth" or knowledge about those in the inferior position as it suits their needs (Foucault, 1980). In this way Western images of China are controlled by Westerners themselves and reflect not so much the realities of Chinese life as the framing activities of the foreigners. This view suggests that China and Chinese culture would be represented by those in power through a particular set of images that would claim to describe the reality. Foucault's concept of power/knowledge relationship corresponds to a great degree to Edward Said's (1935-2003) concept of representation, the deliberate control of which, as he has shown in his work *Orientalism* (1978), demonstrates the exercise of Western power over the Orient. Regardless of which theoretical concept is applied to assess the relationship between China and the West, it is obvious that Western countries' self-regard as the superpowers laid down a solid

fundament for the changing attitudes towards China, a trend which led to an enormous number of images and stereotypes about China, some of them persisting even until the present day. When the women writers in question offered their own images of China for the readership in the West they made an attempt to take back the *pouvoir/savoir* paradigm to China, demonstrating the growing authority of China on the world arena.

China's position as a weak nation became apparent towards the middle of the 19th century, after the defeat in the First Opium War (1839-1842). Previously a relatively self-contained country, China was forced to open its borders for foreign concessions and face new realities where Western representatives in China acquired more and more power. The overall political situation of the unstable time after the First Opium War, followed by the Taiping Uprising (1851-1864) and the outbreak of the Second Opium War (1856-1860), brought the presence of foreign diplomatic missions in China. Protestant missionaries seized the opportunity to go to China and educate its population not only in Christian values, but also in other Western disciplines such as medicine, English and mathematics. These people saw and described China from the position of their own superiority and the images they conveyed to the interested public at home were of barbaric, uneducated and generally backwards Chinese, thus cementing Western perceptions of China in negative terms.

However, this historical period also witnessed a movement of the Chinese population towards the West. Following the humiliation of the defeat in the Opium Wars, there was a necessary presence of Chinese diplomats in the West. Also a wave of Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States in search of a better life. Moreover, Christian missions in China took the initiative to send Chinese students abroad to study in American schools and universities. The attitudes and stereotypes about themselves that the Chinese were met with in foreign countries were not sympathetic and friendly, but often hostile and full of prejudice. Realizing that these perceptions of China and the Chinese were the product of Western misinformation about China, a still growing number of Chinese travelers, diplomats or politicians, students, writers and poets showed interest in presenting their own and 'authentic' Chinese images to the West. Deborah Madsen in her *Chinese American Writers* (2002) shows how early Chinese immigrants tended to write autobiographical

texts depicting China "in idealized, exotic terms in an attempt to reverse negative Chinese stereotypes" (Madsen, 2002:11).[1] However, as she notes

> these writers distanced themselves from the laboring classes of immigrant Chinese and appealed for racial tolerance on behalf of their own educated, privileged class. Autobiography was used to explain the lifestyle, traditions, and culture of upper-class Chinese, who could be seen to share a common humanity with American readers (Madsen, 2002:11).

Thus, she argues, early educated Chinese immigrants, by reacting "to the anti-Chinese prejudice they encountered" and by "explaining the true nature of life in China," started a trend which "gave rise to a tradition of autobiographical writing to which later writers such as Jade Snow Wong and Maxine Hong Kingston have notably contributed" (Ibid., p. 6). Viewing this early trend in terms of the *pouvoir/savoir* paradigm, it is necessary to distinguish it from the attempts at autobiographical narratives of the women writers in question. Although the early immigrants had started a trend of self-writing attempting to regain power by offering the West "correct" knowledge about China, they were nonetheless single individuals and their voices were lonely and scattered. Chinese women writers whose narratives are examined in this study, on the other hand, belonged to a network group of intellectuals who pursued a common goal of joint attempts at rejuvenating China after decades of humiliation by the West. Although many of them received education abroad, considering themselves patriots, they returned home to save China with the means they learned about in the West.

One of the most known interpreters of China for the West, Lin Yutang 林语堂 (1895-1976) wrote a book *My Country and My People* (1935) where he, assuming the authority of a native Chinese, thus expert, explained the essence of the Chinese people in English for his foreign readers. Another returned student, Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962), who became one of the leading Chinese intellectuals of that period, can be credited with having started the autobiographical season in China. Although he did not intend to represent China for the West in his autobiography *Self-narrative at Forty* 四十自述 (1933) but rather inspire the great men of China to follow his example and write about their lives in order to make a historical record for the future generations of Chinese people,

[1] For representative Chinese immigrant autobiographies, see Lee Yan Phou 李延甫 (1861-1938) (pinyin Li Yanbo) (1887) and Yung Wing 容闳 (1828-1912) (pinyin Rong Hong) (1909).

his call for autobiographical literature in China also reached women writers and became a legitimized mode of expression for many of them. With his autobiography Hu Shi opened the door into a genre that Chinese women writers did not feel they had to fight for. Instead they saw Hu's initiative as an opportunity for themselves to colonize autobiography as a new space of self-expression, a space where they could experiment with form and decide on content and frame.[2]

These women writers became first and foremost known and respected in China for their fiction in Chinese. However, some of them also had a fairly good command of the English language which was of tremendous help when they decided to respond to the encouragement of their Chinese and Western friends and write about their lives in English. Well-versed in Western culture these educated and intelligent women attempted to formulate images of the Chinese and their culture through their autobiographies and communicate them directly to the West in English. With this they opened up a dialogic space where the established Western stereotypes about China could become re-negotiated. It is worth noting, however, that some of the autobiographical materials that were written in English were published in Chinese as well. Although they were not an exact copy of the English original there was a certain interplay between the Chinese materials and the English-language versions.

The idea of space is a popular and well-researched concept in modern scholarship. One definition of this concept that especially appeals to me in its usefulness for this study is Gimpel's "transformative space" (Gimpel, 2015:5). Rejecting the limiting perception of space as "the place where one culture meets another" (Ibid., p.5), Gimpel defines space as "[T]he places (personal, physical, textual, intellectual, historical, institutional, etc.) of maneuvering between the registers or narratives of the old and the new both at particular moments in history and over time in general" (Ibid., pp.5-6). In view of this definition, the concept of "transformative space" is a useful category for examining autobiography as a specific place for negotiation and interpretation of Chinese images for foreigners. There is no doubt that all of the Chinese women writers in question saw themselves as cultural interpreters of their own China to the West, equating their own contribution to improving China's image with the work of their male contemporaries such as Lin Yutang. Riding on the autobiographical wave of the time, Chen Hengzhe, Yang Buwei, and Ling Shuhua became

[2] Lu Yin 卢隐 (1898-1934) wrote hers in 1934, Bing Xin 冰心 (1900-1999) wrote short autobiographical chapters dating 1979-1987 including them into various collections of her works (Bing, 2001:149-213), Chen Hengzhe wrote hers in 1935, Xie Binying 谢冰莹 (1906-2000) described her life as a female soldier in 1936, see Lu (2011), Bing (1986, 1991, 2001), Xie (2009).

not only some of the first autobiographers in China, they became also some of the first female cultural translators of China. Having embraced an opportunity to make a difference in their effort to change and transform Western attitudes towards China, these women established themselves as authoritative and representative voices of their nation in an attempt at inter-cultural exchange and communication. Hence the central issues that will be addressed in this dissertation are the questions of constructing a life within a textual space, gaining an authoritative voice in China and about China, opening up spaces of activity and understanding, and of cultural translations.

Although these women's contribution to improving China's image in the West was made in English, which would supposedly make their work more visible for the Western academia, their autobiographies were first discovered towards the end of the 20th century and only then gradually became of interest to literature and history studies. In the following I will briefly outline a few approaches that have been applied to the study of Chinese female autobiography and afterwards lay down the theoretical approach that will establish the niche for this dissertation's inquiry.

Chinese autobiography became a subject of interest in academia in the early 1990s with the influential studies *The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China* (1990) where Wu Pei-yi laid down the first theoretical concepts in the field and *Literary Authority and the Modern Chinese Writer, Ambivalence and Autobiography* (1991) where Wendy Larson examined a range of modern male autobiographies. Scholarly interest for Chinese women's autobiographical writings emerged shortly after with the pioneering dissertation by Janet Ng (1993), and was soon followed by similar dissertations by Wang Lingzhen (1998) and Wang Jing (2000). These scholars continued their work with this topic and established a solid platform for its further study. Adopting different approaches for their academic inquiries, some scholars highlighted the feminist value of Chinese female autobiographies (Ng, 2003; Wang Lingzhen, 2004; Feng, 2006), while others took interest in these texts from the positions of genre studies (Wang Jing, 2008; Cheng, 2010). Also translation studies provided a new angle of analysis for these works (Liu Xiaoqing, 2009). These scholars' analysis was directed at answering the questions as to how Chinese women writers occupied the space of a new (for them) genre of writing, how they positioned themselves politically, socially and emotionally within a culture in transition and embraced the possibility to define themselves.

One of these scholars in particular has been the major inspiration source for this dissertation. In her book *When 'I' was Born: Women's Autobiography in Modern China* (2008) devoted solely to

the analysis of representative women's autobiographies written in Chinese, Wang Jing made literature scholars aware of a rather neglected group of Chinese women writers who wrote their autobiographies in English – Chen Hengzhe, Yang Buwei and Ling Shuhua. Although using a foreign language for writing about their lives does distinguish these women writers from their contemporaries, their contribution does not become less representative for the field of Chinese literature and indeed deserves academic attention. Wang's call was answered by quite a number of scholars who brought various insights into criticism of these writers' autobiographies.[3]

There is no doubt that these studies provide valuable insights for my study in determining how the genre of autobiography was used and appropriated by Chinese women of the early20th century. However, considering the fact that Chinese female autobiography has already been studied through the lens of gender and genre, the latter being a category which, according to Wu, has an insufficient theoretical base within Chinese literary tradition (Wu, 1990:ix), this dissertation takes up a new theoretical approach. Therefore Chinese female autobiographies will not be viewed as texts belonging to a certain genre or written by persons of a certain gender, but as *narratives* carefully constructed and formulated in such a way so as to fit the authors' agenda to establish their authority and, at the same time, improve China's image abroad. This theoretical approach, to my knowledge, has not been applied before to examine Chinese female autobiography. The theory of narrative will not only help me to escape the limitations of earlier approaches but also will provide a frame for the study of self-images and images of China (representations of self and nation) that Chinese women writers wished to convey to and interpret for their foreign readers.

For the purpose of this dissertation narrative theory will be used as understood by a range of scholars that have operated with the concept of narrative in their studies: as a textual construction, as way of framing narratives about China and as a means of communication. Thus, on the one hand, Porter Abbott's theorizing of narrative as a textual construction that consists of a story and a narrative discourse will be helpful in analyzing the build-up of autobiography as a story, where such elements as its narrator, character, voice, time and space are examined (Abbott, 2008). This will allow me to identify the narrative devices Chinese women authors used when writing their life-stories. On the other hand, Mona Baker's concept of framing that she sees as encompassing various

[3] For studies of Chen Hengzhe's autobiography, see, for example, Feng (2006), Cheng (2010, 2011, 2013), Gimpel (2015); for studies of Yang Buwei, see Feng (2011); and, finally, Ling Shuhua's autobiography was approached by Cheng (2007), Hong (2007), Liu Xiaoqing (2009), Zhang (2012).

ways in which interpreters can modify different aspects of source texts or utterances in order to suit the specific agenda of the interpreter, will aid in assessing the way both foreigners and Chinese autobiographers themselves framed their narratives about China (Baker, 2006). Furthermore, this dissertation employs Walter Fisher's take on narration as a means of communication that is capable of transporting not only stories between people and cultures, but also ideas and images that move from country to country (across countries' boundaries) and create certain ways of how we perceive others (Fisher, 1984:8). This narrative paradigm will help in answering the questions of how Chinese women's autobiography can be seen as facilitating Sino-Western communication and why some roles and identities are allowed to be created during this process, while others are not.

Fisher's discussions of narrative as a form of human communication can acquire an extra dimension if viewed along with Mikhail Bakhtin's term *dialogue,* which is "characteristic of all verbalized human interaction" (Renfrew, 2015:79). Initially studied on literary material,[4] the idea of a dialogue developed into a universal global concept which encompasses all self-other interactions. These interactions can take place externally, i.e between two people (or in this case between the autobiographer and the reader) and internally i.e between the autobiographer's earlier and later self (like in the case of Ling Shuhua who tells her story as an older woman through a child's perspective). The concept of dialogue seems indispensable for my approach to view experience and, with it, autobiography as a site for human intercommunication where an author sharing a personal story actually or implicitly anticipates a response from the reader. Such verbal communication, however, is not the only space which can be characterized as dialogic. According to Bakhtin, it is not only words that can undergo the process of "dialogization," but discourse, language and culture as well (Holquist, 2011:427). Applied to this study, such a view makes it possible to regard female autobiography furthermore as a dialogue between male and female literary discourses, between traditionally inherited and new female roles, between the literary and the vernacular language, and ultimately, a dialogue between Chinese and Western cultures. Hence, this study, while adopting the earlier academic research positions that serve as a solid fundament and bring invaluable insights into our knowledge about early Chinese female autobiography, applies a combination of theoretical approaches offered by scholars that focus on the processes that take place within narratives themselves. The ideas of interaction between a story and a narrative discourse, the ways of framing

[4] In what now is considered Bakhtin's key essay and generally one of his most important works "Discourse in the Novel," he presented a brilliant treatment of the idea of dialogism in literature, see Bakhtin (2011:259-423).

narratives, the communicational and dialogic values of narratives are used in this study in order to contribute to an adequate understanding of how new identity forms manifested themselves through cultural memory processes in Chinese female autobiography in the early twentieth century increasing our awareness of dialogic communication processes within and across cultural, generic and literary genre boundaries.

When women writers formulated self-images and new identities in their life-narratives they were influenced not only by the foreign stereotypes about China and the Chinese but also by the way literary images of women were formulated through Chinese literature that allowed women to play only certain kind of roles or at least envisioned them in a relatively small number. Therefore, in this dissertation the notion of image will be viewed from three different perspectives: images as narrative frames (Mona Baker's term (2006), images as roles that are played by literary characters and images as identities that are constructed by the authors of autobiographies. When dealing with autobiographical images of the self in the Chinese context I find it essential first to trace what images (or narrative frames) of Chinese women were formulated from the outside - by foreigners. Following that it will be necessary to give an overview of what images (or roles) Chinese women were stereotyped into within Chinese literary tradition – by the Chinese and largely male literati. This will bring the discussion to what images (or identities) were formulated or chosen by the Chinese women autobiographers themselves, the images that they were free to frame for their Western readers.

When I use the term image, I do so from the perspective of a textual image or image that is created by virtue of written words. Therefore, exploring images as narratives frames here means tracing the expressions of images created by a set of vocabulary that was used by Western observers to deliberately define or stereotype China and its people into certain categories. Taking images as roles that were available for Chinese women means assessing literary roles that were available for female characters in Chinese literature. And, finally, by equaling the term of image with identity I propose to examine textual expressions of certain roles and self-images that Chinese women autobiographers expressed through their life-narratives on the basis of the image-mix that was culturally available for them. All these textual images are the integral parts of different narratives that were constructed either about Chinese women (by the foreign and domestic narratives) or by the Chinese women themselves.

In order to examine what images Chinese women writers pictured in their autobiographies, why they felt an urge to communicate with the West through these images and whether this communication proved to be successful, it is necessary to determine how Western countries saw China in historical perspective. The main premise of Chapter One is then to establish the images that were formulated by Westerners about China in the course of the Western ”discovery” and occasional ”rediscovery” of China and the Chinese from the earliest contacts between the two civilizations to the early twentieth century. Westerners – defined here as Americans and Europeans – have always “seen” China through a uniquely Western perspective. In other words, our own cultural background to a large extent “programs” how we see China and all things Chinese. The aim is to isolate, discuss and define the most persistent images of China in the West and how these images have developed and changed over time. From sources such as written records left by some famous Western visitors to China, such as travelers and Jesuit missionaries, journalists’ reports from China and literary writers’ works about China, this chapter will look at stereotypes of China and its people. To provide a theoretical background for this chapter I adopt Mona Baker’s idea of framing which allows me to assess the reasons why narratives about China acquired many opposing connotations during the centuries-long contact between China and the West. This chapter is meant as a necessary historical overview and will largely depend on research previously done on Sino-Western relations.

The first chapter also provides a brief overview of what images were historically available for people outside China, who formulated them, which light they were presented through and through which means. Highlighting the problem of a very limited range of images of Chinese women available in the West, this chapter will furthermore argue that the established situation by the 20th century opened up a space for a group of Chinese women writers to mobilize their efforts to reformulate the predominant view of China and of Chinese women in particular for the Western audience.

While the first chapter outlines the foreign background on which the Chinese autobiographers could “think” themselves, the second chapter delineates the home backdrop for such a rethinking activity. Besides the images that that were interpreted and framed by Westerners, Chinese women writers were also influenced by Chinese literary images. This chapter will therefore provide an assessment of a few representative works of Chinese literature in order to determine a range of available images that women writers could work with in their autobiographies. Since

Chinese literary criticism does not provide a solid theoretical framework for a classification of roles that female characters typically play in Chinese literature, I employ a typology of female images elaborated on the basis of a survey of representative works of Western literature by Pearson and Pope (1976). Pearson and Pope distinguish six typical roles for female literary characters. They argue that female characters can be classified not only according to their female characteristics, which define them as heroines and allot them the roles of virgins, mistresses and helpmates, but also according to their male characteristics. These allow women to stand out as intelligent, talented and active characters and occupy roles of sages, artists and warriors – roles which are typically used to describe male heroes. Chapter Two is therefore designed as a necessary overview of traditional female roles in Chinese literature. Relying largely on available critical readings of Chinese literature, I extract their assessment of female roles in literary narratives and test them against Pearson and Pope's typology determining similarities and differences. This step is necessary for determining whether Chinese female images presented in the autobiographies under scrutiny could fit into the generally accepted female roles in Western perception and be therefore comprehensible for the Western readers.

Chapter Two therefore highlights the absence of women's self-images in Chinese literature which was traditionally largely a reserve of men. Described by others (male literati), women were put in a disabled position where they had to be content with roles assigned to them. Although some literary writings allowed a certain variation and diversity in female roles and images, they usually belonged to a lower branch of Chinese literature which was meant for entertainment and not meant as examples for imitation. Therefore this chapter treats a range of Chinese texts – from canonical to fictional - as the main sources for establishing a basic range of female literary role models.

With the two introductory chapters that lay down images of China as framed by Western interpreters and images of Chinese women as framed by literary roles such as daughter, mother and wife, I present a substantial fundament for the analysis of the images created by the modern Chinese writers – Chen Hengzhe, Yang Buwei and Ling Shuhua. In this dissertation I will argue that the authorial identities behind the images that these women constructed for themselves were of heroes possessing male characteristics and therefore the authority to represent and interpret China and to speak up on behalf of the Chinese nation and Chinese women in particular. Born into similar backgrounds around the same time in history, they provided very different portraits of themselves and their life-journeys.

In Chapter Three, which analyzes Chen Hengzhe's *Autobiography of a Young Girl*, I argue that Chen positioned herself as first and foremost a Scholar and an Educator, roles that are absent from Pearson and Pope's typology, but can be definitely fitted among the roles that describe hero characteristics. Born into a literati family with a long tradition of encouraging female education and artistic talent, Chen Hengzhe constructs her narrative around her childhood and early adolescence and assesses it from the position of her grownup self who cannot help noticing the worsening position of women around the world and of Chinese women in particular. Letting her own early years serve as an example representative of all women in China, she denounces some of the traditional Chinese customs that she believes are being revived after she and her contemporaries had expended so much energy on burying them. Her autobiography can be compared with a historical survey of the customs that stole women's freedom, mobility and ability to act on equal terms with men. An educated historian, Chen views herself as entitled to speak up to the world and demand sympathy with China's young people. Although she does not see herself in the role of a warrior, denouncing it as unnecessarily destructive and unworthy of a person with literary roots like herself, she can be viewed as a scholarly warrior. Taking up the fight against the old cultural institutions in China such as arranged marriage and footbinding she uses the literary weapon of the written word.

Much unlike Chen Hengzhe, who received a history degree from an American university and later became an established writer, Yang Buwei, whose *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman* comes under scrutiny in Chapter Four, cannot exactly be called a prolific woman writer of the May Fourth period.[5] A doctor by profession, Yang, having written a cookbook prior to her autobiography, never desires to see herself as a scholar or a writer even though her educational background and professional achievements could allow her to do that. Instead, she devotes her narrative to the subject that she knows best – herself. Positioning herself as first and foremost a woman, she builds her image around all the possible roles that a woman can or has to play during her lifetime. A woman "with trousers on" when a situation calls for it, she portrays herself as being able to play all female and male roles on Pearson and Pope's list and even more than that. An expert in everything Chinese for foreign friends and expert in foreign matters for the Chinese, she demonstrates her competency in matters of inter-cultural communication and positions herself as a typical Chinese woman.

[5] For a discussion of this period, see Chow (1960).

The final chapter deals with Ling Shuhua's life-narrative *Ancient Melodies*. Quite different from the two self-declared autobiographies discussed above, Ling's text is ambiguous in matters of determining its genre. However, since, for the purpose of this dissertation, it is more important to determine the kind of images that Ling constructed in her narrative, this chapter will focus on her positioning herself as an artist. This role, which is inherently male according to Person and Pope's classification, allowed Ling to play the role of a cultural interpreter for the Western reader on a whole new level compared to the attempts made by Chen and Yang. A real connoisseur of Chinese arts, painting, literature, music and philosophy, she portrayed Chinese culture for her reader with the light brush strokes of her pen letting the reader decide for himself or herself what he or she sees. Ling is never judgmental or patronizing like Chen, she is not an expert on everything Chinese and Western either. Communicating with her reader in a subtle and yet powerful way, she opens up his or her eyes to the wealth and abundance of traditional Chinese culture, which Western readers had tended to view and portray in mainly negative terms.

I will conclude this dissertation with an effort to synthesize and extend the discussion of the three modern Chinese female autobiographies in terms of their similarities and differences and then offer some general conclusions about their narratives as image-formulating strategies.

Chapter One

Existing Narratives of China in the West

1.Introduction

As indicated in the introduction to this dissertation, an essential aid to the analysis of Chinese women's self-portrayal towards the West is the knowledge of Western perceptions of China. Westerners' images of China affected the way these woman saw themselves because they were aware of these preconceptions. As their English autobiographies were clearly meant for the Western audience, the Chinese female authors worked with the stereotypical perceptions of China that foreigners had become used to operating with. Conforming to some of those perceptions and rejecting others, women autobiographers wanted to serve their reader what they at that moment considered a more nuanced and real portrait of China and the Chinese. However, when examining Western perceptions of China, one cannot escape considering the West's images of itself revealed through its perceptions of China. This line of thinking has found reflection in Wang Lixin's assertion that China "served as a mirror for Americans to look at themselves" (Wang Lixin, 2008:110). Taking America as an example he argues that the images America formulated of China during different periods of time were self-serving and can be perceived as a way of defining America's national identity, values and place in the world (Ibid., p.110). Although it is not the intention of this dissertation to examine how America's self-perception was built up against its perceptions of China, an understanding of how Westerners perceived themselves is certainly helpful in building my own argument that the West's images of China in general were framed – or constructed - with a certain agenda in mind. It is possible now to argue that changing perceptions about China through history have reflected the way Western countries saw themselves: first, as discoverers of China as a remote and mysterious country, then, as admirers of its riches and marvels, later as advocates of Christianity, and finally as technologically and scientifically advanced super powers which intended to save China from poverty and backwardness. Each of these periods offered stereotypical terminology that would describe China as exotic and magnificent, barbaric and secluded, poor and weak. At the turn of the century, when Chinese women discovered the genre of

autobiography, they also realized that this form of expression could become a tool for changing Western images of and rhetoric about China, a tool where they could position themselves as legitimate and authoritative interpreters of China for the West. In a way they could offer their own reframing of the artificial constructions that the West operated with. I return to the idea of framing shortly, but before some more complicated issues need to be addressed.

First, it is necessary to define what the "West" means and how this term is going to be used in this dissertation. When this chapter employs the concept of "the West," it is with the awareness that the West is not something monolithic and homogeneous and cannot be thought of as possessing a total culture. At different periods of time, different parts of the Western world were interested in China and made attempts at its exploration and interpretation. Thus in the 13th to 14th centuries China was in contact with Portuguese explorers and Italian merchants. In the 16th century, the "West" was represented by the order of the Jesuits which sent its members to China from across the whole of Europe – Portugal, Italy, Germany, Poland. By the end of the 17th century China was seen through the eyes of the French Jesuits, and in the 18th century by French philosophers as well. The 19th century's "West" was mainly British and towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century it was largely American. However, due to the space and scope limitations of this dissertation, the collective notion "West" cannot be avoided completely and will be used as a geographic opposition to the term "East."

Moreover, the problems of the notion "West" lie not only in which countries China encountered during the span of many centuries. When one considers the notion of the modern West and tries to assess its identity and meaning over time, a number of questions arise. Paul Cohen argues that even the modern West changed so much over time that it is practically impossible to speak of similarities in the influence that the "modern West" of the 1840s and the "modern West" of the 1920s exerted on China (Cohen, 1984:12). Hence, it can be assumed that an everchanging West needed new and refreshed images of China to mirror changes in Western society. The issue of the different "kinds" of the "West" is complicated furthermore by considering what types of Western individuals met with China. In Cohen's words:

> A man who left the West to do missionary work in China in the nineteenth century was probably not a very typical Westerner to begin with. After living in China for a while, he surely became even less typical. In learning Chinese and adopting certain Chinese customs, he interacted with his new environment, and a process of hybridization set in. No longer a Westerner pure and simple, he became a Westerner in China (Cohen, 1984:13).

Thus it can be concluded that the meeting between China and the West and the assessment of their interaction was/is complicated by a whole range of factors. However, as this chapter is only intended as an overview of the Western images of China in order to furnish my analysis of autobiographies with some concrete image frames, it is necessarily brief and does not provide a deep inquiry into the nature and the process of construction of the West's own image.

Furthermore, the primary focus of this dissertation is on the conceptual images of China. As the subjects of interest for this study lived and wrote their autobiographies during the first half of the 20th century, the images of China that come under scrutiny naturally dismiss those that Westerners could derive from television programs, films and the internet of later decades of this century. This delimitation of employed images also means narrowing down the scope of the Western image formulators and image consumers to a group of more or less educated Westerners (and the Chinese of the late 19th and early 20th century). The Westerners gained their knowledge about China from visiting it, reading books and magazines about it, viewing Chinese art and, later, photography.[6] The delimitation of employed images to only print media also means that prior to the spreading of television and internet, the formulation and framing of images about China can be viewed as largely an intellectual debate/activity. Therefore we must be aware that the result of such activity cannot be taken as representative for either the whole of the "West" or for the whole of China and will inevitably produce a range of limited and one-sided images of China.

When female writers of the early 20th century started their activities as literary writers who expressed their concern about the slow progress of China's modernization, they did so in the common spirit of their time to save China through new ideas and new methods borrowed from the West (Dooling and Torgeson, 1998:11). One of directions for such modernization was language and literary reform which allowed female activity. Not only could they now express themselves publicly through their writing, but also appropriate new writing forms such as the genre of autobiography.[7] This genre opened a new space for self-expression for both Chinese and Western writers. Influenced by Western ideas about modernity and about Chinese society, Chinese women autobiographers used this new genre to construct their own images against those of foreign observers. Therefore the overview of the images of China that Western formulators constructed for themselves and their home audience is essential. Being women writers, they could not help also

[6] Visual images supplied by photography will not be considered in this study due to space limitations.
[7] On the beginnings of female autobiography in China, see Wang Jing (2008).

addressing the issues of female images. Well-educated, some of them even with degrees from Western universities, these women writers were familiar both with domestic and foreign female images as well as with Western portrayals of Chinese women in particular. Therefore, the final section of this chapter, after an overview of the imagery-range that Western observers constructed of Chinese women, reflects on how native Chinese women writers became aware of their own ability and even duty to represent China for the West. Feeling responsible for China's future and the way it was perceived by the West they realized that if they wanted the world to get to know the real China as they perceived it, they should take the lead and portray it themselves. This action reflects these female authors' attempt to remove the heteronomy of native or foreign definition of the Chinese female and gain autonomy and agency for themselves. In a way, this attempt can be viewed as an attempt at framing China and the Chinese on their own terms. Hence, the further analysis in later chapters will deal with the issues concerning what kind of images Chinese women writers chose to show to their readers, how they undertook a task of communicating what they believed to be new and authentic female images to the Western audience, and how they manipulated those images to make them intelligible to a Western audience and well received by it.

2. Theorizing Narrative: Framing as Category of Analysis

In the following I give an overview of the established images about China in the West while employing the theoretical category of narrative framing. This category provides a solid base structure for the evaluation of the dynamics of the East-West relations and, to my knowledge, has not yet been used before in this respect. The notion of framing has proved to be invaluable for many disciplines, consequently attaining slightly different shades of meaning in different contexts. While it is not the intention of this chapter to assess the ambiguity of this term, the definition of narrative framing as suggested by Mona Baker (2006) will constitute the starting point for my analysis. Although Baker works mainly with frames for translation, her definition applies well to other interpretative frames. Defined by Baker as "an active strategy that implies agency and by means of which we consciously participate in the construction of reality" (Baker, 2006:106), the notion of framing will be applied for assessing narrative strategies that were actively adopted by the West to describe China. I will assess the vocabulary and rhetorical strategies that Western narrators used to frame China as it suited the larger discourse of the particular historical period they lived in. The images of China that were carefully chosen by Western narrators contributed to the construction of

a certain reality, a certain "truth" about it. Thus the concept of narrative framing, as it is used below, will become the tool for examining what kind of images were formulated in Western narratives of China, how those images were stereotyped and how they changed in the course of history. Furthermore, Chinese women's "active agency" (Baker, 2006:106) which manifested itself through formulating what they considered authentic images of China in their autobiographies, as suggested above, can also be viewed in terms of narrative framing. This term is therefore an invaluable aid for this analysis in assessing, on the one hand, the way foreign stereotypes influenced how the Chinese perceived themselves and, on the other hand, how the Chinese women writers attempted to present or re-frame themselves for the West through the genre of autobiography.

Stereotyping narratives about China that found their way to the Western audience through travelogues, literature and missionary accounts can be evaluated not only in terms of framing. A similar idea was expressed prior to Mona Baker's definition of frame, albeit in a rather different context by Edward Said. In his influential study *Orientalism* (1978) he operates with the term "representation" as a device for depicting the Orient. Exterior by definition, representation is not to be seen as a truthful or "natural" depiction of the Orient, but merely as a tool for creating a certain view of the Orient. Thus Said argues that the author's position to the "Orient" he describes is always colored by "the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text - all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf" (Said, 1995:20). Hence by assuming the authority to represent the Orient, the Western author presents an artificial construction, or a frame, through which he provides his idea of what Orient is. Therefore as a scholar, to gain an insight into just how the construction of the Orient evolves, one has to look at "style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, not the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original" (Said, 1995:21). It can also be added that Said's position, which assigns the Western author the authority of representation of the Orient, corresponds to Foucault's power/knowledge (*pouvoir/savoir*) concept that describes a relationship which allows the one in a position of power, in this case the Western author, to construct the "truth" about those in the inferior position, or as in this case, China. While it is not my intention to view Western ideas of China as purely orientalist representation or in terms of a power/knowledge relationship, it is obvious that Said's and Foucault's takes on this problem go hand in hand with Baker's idea of narrative framing. Hence, in the attempt to assess the nature of relations, interpretation and representation of China by the West, this chapter works with the

assumption that the narratives that have been told of China in the West were constructed, interpreted, re-interpreted and framed with certain agendas behind them.

Framing, as Baker argues, involves several types of criteria that are essential to understanding how this process works: temporal and spatial criteria, selective appropriation and labeling (Baker, 2006:112). Viewing how Western narratives of China were embedded in a temporal and spatial context, how some aspects of narratives were selected, downplayed or, perhaps, added to and whether parts of those narratives were represented/ labelled by a specific term or phrase, will make it possible to determine the cultural stereotypes that had been constructed about China. These are the stereotypes that modern Chinese women writers felt necessitated to define themselves against, utilizing some and reframing others, constantly reformulating and demarcating images of themselves as women.

3. Scholarship on Portrayals of China

Western cultural stereotypes about China that Chinese women writers found themselves confronting at the beginning of the twentieth century have become an object of interest for many scholars. They not only traced the evolution of Western images and defined the stereotypes of China but also connected them to the masterminds responsible for their creation. Roughly, Western images about China can be divided into two groups: those constructed by the Westerners themselves and those formulated by the Chinese through their depictions of Chinese life for a Western audience. As most of the reviewed scholarship focusses on the first group, treating Westerners as the active subjects/ image-formulators, largely neglecting the second group, it is essential to fill in this gap by examining the images that the Chinese formulated and offered to the West on their own. This can provide some starting points for the later analysis of how Chinese women writers portrayed themselves and their country to the Western reader.

Throughout history there have existed multiple images of China in the Western world. Very positive at times, these images were turned upside down and gained negative connotations at other times. As Raymond Dawson so rightly put it, “China has at one time or another been thought to be rich and poor, advanced and backward, wise and stupid, beautiful and ugly, strong and weak, honest and deceitful” (Dawson, 1968:2). With changing Western perceptions of itself, perceptions of China changed as well. The question of historical interaction between China and the West has been a

subject of interest for many scholars who produced numerous works on this topic (Dawson, 1968; Roberts, 1991; Meyers, 1982; Gregory, 2003; Mackerras, 1989; Shen, 1996; Embree and Gluck, 1997). Most of them illustrate the chronological historical development of the West-Eastern relations with China from the earliest known contacts to the beginning of the twentieth century; some provide insights into the nature of changing views the West had about China (Gregory, 2003; Mackerras, 1989). In spite of the considerable number of such studies and collections, very few of them view Sino-Western relations from the Chinese perspective (Franke, 1967; Fitzgerald, 1969; Zheng, 2013). While the above-mentioned scholarship represents the English-language academic inquiries, there are also Chinese scholars who have looked into the subject of Sino-Western relations (Xiong, 1994; Wang Jienan, 2009). The Chinese studies concentrate mostly on the quite recent period of Sino-Western contact, chronologically covering the historic events starting roughly from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century. This is possibly due to the fact that the period in question is one that continues to influence China's perception of itself today. Known in China as the "hundred years of humiliation," it constitutes an era that China has yet to put behind it.[8] Although the Sino-Western relationship has been a subject of interest for many Western and Chinese scholars, the number of studies that aim at viewing this intercultural exchange from the Chinese perspective are still relatively few. This dissertation's objective is therefore to deepen an understanding of the relationship between China and the West by studying how China speaks/spoke for itself with the example of Chinese female autobiography.

4. The Evolution of Images of China

The relationship between East and West was built on centuries-long direct and indirect impressions of each other. In spite of the diversity of the views of China which evolved through Sino-Western contact, there can be distinguished a certain tendency to such development. The changing views towards China from genuine fascination to predominantly negative attitudes can be linked with the major representatives who formulated images of China according to the norms and expectations of the age their lived in. The temporal and spatial aspect of narrative framing is especially important in viewing how people during different historical periods could affect their contemporaries' perception

[8] On research of China's "humiliation" by the West and its attempts at overcoming the national crisis by promotion of physical education, see Xu (2008).

of China. Among the major image-formulators about China who played prominent roles during different stages, six major groups can be singled out (as in Mackerras, 1989): travelers, merchants, missionaries, diplomats, journalists and academics - all of them exhibiting a genuine interest in exploring China and in re-presenting what they believed they had seen.

While it is true that these groups overlap each other, for example, many missionaries and diplomats became sinologists and many academics turned their interest to journalism, the common truth about them is that "the overwhelming majority of image-creators have been intellectuals in the sense of being literate people capable of constructing images in written form" (Mackerras, 1989:8). This observation invites an assumption that these intellectuals risked formulating rather distorted images of China and Chinese, as they interacted with the educated Chinese belonging to a higher class of society and inevitably were influenced in their view of Chinese society. The ordinary Chinese must have been misrepresented as well, as they were assessed from the premises of the educated elite.

In the following I attend to the representations of Western views of China through a chronological overview of the Sino-Western contacts since antiquity. The subchapters will be arranged as to reflect Mackerras' division of Western image-formulators into groups. This approach will allow me to trace the evolvement and change of the West's perceptions of China.

4.1. The Earliest Western Representations

The ideas the West and China had about each other were, to begin with, very unclear. People of the Roman Empire were aware of China and the Chinese knew something about the Romans. This awareness manifested itself, on the one hand, in the Romans' vague knowledge about China as the place that was inhabited by the Seres or people who produced silk (Mackerras, 1989:15; Franke 1967:1). On the other hand, the Chinese knew of the Roman Empire which they called "Da Qin" 大秦 or the Great Qin thus acknowledging the Romans as belonging to an equal level of civilization (Qin 秦) (Fitzgerald, 1969:8), albeit somewhat taller in stature then themselves (Da 大). Both empires discovered that they could constitute excellent and lucrative markets for each other – Chinese silk and Roman glass were the luxury commodities of that time and, although a trade route was established through the vast areas of hostile lands in-between the two empires, direct contact

was virtually impossible. Therefore the possibility of exerting an influence on each other's lives was negligible. China and the West could recognize each other's existence, admire the quality of each other's craftsmanship, but this connection as yet had no impact on the political relations, no influence on thought or literature (Fitzgerald, 1969:9). Although the few descriptions that can be found about the Romans in Chinese records and about Chinese in the Roman records are scarce and unclear, the mutual acknowledgement of each other's craftsmanship points to the fact that it was framed by economic interests.

The first more or less coherent account of China was written down at the beginning of the seventh century when an Egyptian Greek, Theophylactos of Simocatta, described it as a country called Taugast (Mackerras, 1989:15-16; Franke, 1967:2-3). Obtaining information from the Central Asian Turks who probably can be held responsible for naming China as Taugast, Theophylactos presented a people who, as Franke puts it, "venerated images of gods, had just laws and displayed a calm and unhurried judgment" (Franke, 1967:3). Mackerras also gives Theophylactos the honor of being the first serious formulator of ideas about China highlighting such images of China as "a large, powerful, and rich country with a thriving commerce," as well as mentioning its emperor who was said to own 700 concubines and golden chariots for them to be transported in (Mackerras, 1989:16). This description allows Mackerras to treat the account as one which laid down the beginnings of the stereotypical perception of China as "a rich and exotic marvel", an idea that, as he claims, would dominate Western images for many centuries (Mackerras, 1989:16).

However, we should be aware that when Mackerras operates with the term "exotic" he does so from the positions of the modern usage of this word which, according to *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology* (2003) only in 1629 acquired the "extended general sense of unusual or strange" (Barnhart, 2003:356). When Theophylact described China, its people, their way of life and their emperor with all his numerous concubines, he used this term with its original connotation "foreign," or "alien," (from the Greek "exotikos," or literally "from the outside,") (Ibid., p. 356). Therefore it is hard to imagine that his Western readers, the few of them who at all were able to read this account, would perceive the Chinese way of life as "exotic" in a way that we understand this word today. It was probably perceived more as foreign, different, hard-to-believe in or fascinating. The modern usage of this word acquired unfavorable even derogatory aspects to it as the relations between East and West began to be defined by the relations of power. Thus when Western narratives describe something as 'exotic,' they do so from a superior perspective, since the West

stands in the position of strength letting the East occupy the position of weakness. If we begin to call the West's earliest perceptions of China exotic, as in the case of Theophylactos' account, we risk distorting the picture which does not yet contain any signs of orientalistic attitudes and imply that China was deviating from the norms established in and by the West already since the 7th century. Such ambiguity of this term has implications for Western scholars, myself included, as it is impossible to dismiss this term altogether. However, it is essential that its usage reflects an awareness of what it meant and how it was used at different times. Returning to Theophylactos' account of China as "a rich and exotic marvel," it is now possible to argue that it can be seen as one of the first framing attempts that the West imposed on China: China as rich, powerful and wondrous and at the same time a different place, quite other than the world around Theophylactos himself. Indeed during the Tang dynasty (618-906), Chinese porcelain was being exported to the Middle East and North Africa in large amounts. It would have cemented the idea that great and beautiful and rare things came from there (Zeng, 2014:2).

With this in mind, the next section turns to a more varied set of images that the West gained about China during the span of the early 13th to the first half of the 20th century. A quite long and fragile link that existed between the two distant empires was prone to frequent interruptions caused by the rise and fall of the empires in Central Asia that geographically connected the Far East and the Far West. The 7th century account by Theophylactos would not be accompanied by other descriptions for several centuries due to the rise of Muslim power which "placed a curtain between China and the West" (Mackerras, 1989:16).

4.2. Wondrous Images of China through the Eyes of Travelers and Adventurers

Although the first group of Westerners who came into a direct contact with China were hardly intellectuals, they still contribute to the initial attempts to create distinct images of a far-away empire. Thus the first group of the travelers, among whom were adventurous sailors, soldiers, merchants, and occasionally also missionaries, is associated with the age of the first travels in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries where their participants visited remote countries for the first time. Driven by the hope of large profits, the first visitors from Portugal appeared as wild and often violent barbarians to the refined Chinese. Indeed, these representatives of the Western culture "were not the most learned, cultivated, and mature element in Western civilization which the Chinese first

encountered" (Fitzgerald, 1969:27). Even if those people had left any accounts of their meeting with China, oral or written, it is Marco Polo's (1254-1324) account that stands out as the most comprehensive and rich in detail in 13th century Europe. Although he was not the first to "discover" China, the story of his travels can be considered as the first consistent and vivid narrative of the "customs and usages," "novelties and curiosities," and "all the remarkable things that he had seen on the way" (Wood, 1995:7). Describing the capital of China as a "metropolis of immense population and prosperity," the city of Suzhou as a "bustling town of colorful silk and numerous (6,000) bridges," the city of Hangzhou as a city which "boasted a population of two million engaging in 12 major trades" and housed "the largest palace in the world with a perimeter of ten miles" as well as home to the magnificent West Lake (Shen, 1996:174), Marco Polo created an image that would be hard to believe for his countrymen. While there is much discussion in the academic world about the trustworthiness of his description (Dawson, 1967:11; Mackerras, 1989:19) and whether he had travelled to China at all (Wood, 1995), the fact remains that he left a written account where he formulated some of the earliest images and stereotypes of China as wondrous place, an empire "great" and "magnificent" in every respect.

One of the academics who believes Marco Polo did visit China, Wolfgang Franke, holds the opinion that Polo's account first became unreliable when it was translated into numerous languages due to its popularity. Taking many liberties, those translators were not shy about adding some fantastic stories of their own to Polo's account (Franke, 1967:14) almost making the original story into a fairy tale. Moreover, Franke argues that it was because European Christians considered themselves more culturally refined that they were not ready to hear about the existence of another highly advanced civilization and take such an account as the truth. Europeans of that time would therefore rather prefer to read "distorted accounts of foreign nations and their heathen superstitions" (Franke, 1967:15) than allow the thought that there existed their equals somewhere else in the world. Here is the example of one of the first distortions of China's image when Western narrators and translators deliberately added fantasy-like images of China as those were more agreeable to the taste and expectations of the audience of those days. Thus, as will also be shown with the examples of later images of China, Western discoverers and observers of China selected certain narratives which, embedded in a temporal and spatial context, began to serve as frames for how China was to be perceived at a given time and place. Catering to the tastes of his age, Marco Polo introduced a spectacular and far-away civilization, something that his reader would not even be able to imagine without his help. Although, in his narrative, he devoted very little space to Chinese religion, art,

literature or intellectual life (Mackerras, 1989:18-21), Marco Polo's account emphasized the splendor and sophistication of China and provided a wealth of detail on commerce and trade, ways of government, city design and punishment methods. When Polo described places in China that he had visited and exaggerated their splendor and prosperity, he did so as a reaction to try to position the "new world" that opened up in front of him according to what he had already known of great cities of Europe. Polo's attempt to introduce China in a particular manner and to measure its achievements against the West's own standards created a time-and-space specific frame that offered images full of myths and stereotypes of unbelievable character. This act resulted in awakening a genuine fascination with an element of sheer disbelief with China while simultaneously advocating the idea of travel to the East among Europeans.

4.3. Images of Strange and Heathen China Formulated by Discoverers and the Jesuits

After the fall of Mongol rule (roughly the middle of the 14th century), there was a pause in the further exploration of China for about one and a half centuries. The contact between the West and China resumed with renewed interest at the beginning of the sixteenth century – the age of the great discoveries when new adventurers went in Marco Polo's footsteps. A new group of people would soon become responsible for presenting their China to the West. Among the representatives of many European countries such as Portugal, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands who found their way to China as merchants, travelers and missionaries, the Jesuits stand out as the most influential group to hold authority over the formulation of the images of China up to the 18th century. The influence over the church and society that this group held for centuries was due to the activity that its members sought to perform. They have served as leading missionaries to various places in the world (China being only one of them), they founded the most prestigious universities and published innumerable works and translations.[9] In matters of interpreting and representing China, the Jesuits, as Frainas-Maitre puts it, "represented a window on China" (Frainas-Maitre, 2003:38). Having authored an enormous number of documents on China, Jesuit missionaries furnished not only the broad public with information but also the greatest thinkers and philosophers of their time. Being virtually the only people who knew the Chinese language and could present Europe with first-hand experiences of China, missionaries were destined to play the most prominent role in the politics of

[9] On the history of the Jesuit Order, see O'Malley (2014).

writing about China in the 16th – 18th centuries. Through their narratives of China they created a frame of a strange and heathen place which justified their missions there. Such representation, on the one hand, allowed them to continue transmitting previous images of China as a strange and different place, and, on the other hand, to demonstrate that, however praiseworthy China's way of life was, the superstitious and scientifically backward Chinese needed help to find the true God.

Positioning themselves as interpreters of China for the Europeans, the Jesuits initially presented China as "a distant planet, full of oddness, with hieroglyphic writing" (Frainas-Maitre, 2013:44). In doing this they continued supplying the West with a number of peculiar and odd stories about China and its people for two centuries. By highlighting the strangeness of China's customs, the Jesuits advocated the need for interpretation of all the oddities that were so hard to understand for a European mind. And who would be better suited for the role of interpreter than the Jesuits themselves? Frainas-Maitre argues that it was the perception of China's strangeness and otherness that later developed into the taste for "chinoiserie." This trend, manifesting itself in appreciation of Chinese art and craftsmanship since the mid- seventeenth century (Ibid., p. 44), developed in the eighteenth century into a passion for the Chinese "touch" in any artistic manifestation be it interior decoration, architecture, gardening, literature or theatre.

Besides interpreting China's strangeness to the home audience, the Jesuits saw their mission as aiding the Chinese to convert to Christianity. Hence they created a discourse of a nation in need of expert interpretation and intervention. One of the most known and influential Jesuits to undertake this enterprise was Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) who is considered to have authored the first influential Jesuit works on China. He early realized that the immense size and the huge population would inevitably become a hindrance to the Jesuit mission. Hence a wise tactic had to be chosen in order to convince the Chinese to convert and to convince the broad public at home that the Chinese needed converting. In other words, Jesuits had to justify their own missions to China. The approach he adopted was very clever indeed. Ricci directed his effort to the upper-class Chinese applying the method of converting through science (Frainas-Maitre, 2013:40) and adapting Christianity to Chinese needs while looking for its connections with Confucianism. In this way, the European religion was to become more accessible for the Chinese elite who not only would embrace the Christian God and gain scientific insight into the nature of the world but would subsequently spread Christianity to the ordinary uneducated people. At the same time, by portraying China generally in a positive light and simultaneously highlighting the perceived lack of scientific approach in China,

the Jesuit missions would be approved at home. Framing China in these terms, Matteo Ricci started a tendency among the Jesuits to formulate a favorable view of China, which missionary authors continued to present to European readers and which European historians and philosophers relied heavily upon. When he was downplaying the less attractive sides of Chinese society and stressing its peace-loving nature and intellectual tradition, Ricci not only targeted the home audience. In Mackerras' view, this was a carefully considered tactic "since the Jesuits had chosen to work from the top down it was in their interests to show the ruling class as effective and to get on well with them" (Mackerras, 1989:34).

Through their activities in China the Jesuits provided Europeans not only with a wealth of images but numerous clichés as well. Frainas-Maitre enumerates those of the "Chinese wise man" which came to be associated with Confucius, the "enlightened despot" or the "philosopher king" who served as China's ruler, and, of course, the "backwardness" of China in the sciences which was due to the lack of motivation and competition (Frainas-Maitre, 2013:46-53). The Jesuits thus succeeded in the construction of a *vocabulary* or a set of linguistic stereotypes to describe China, the stereotypes that until 19th century were readily repeated by historians, philosophers and the general audience who themselves did not have the knowledge of the Chinese language or the possibility of travel to China. Whether the Jesuit-formulated images of Chinese society were accurate or misguiding, they were considered as the common truth at that time and served as the foundational knowledge and vocabulary for anyone who wrote about China. A position that deserves a special attention, however, is that the Jesuits were the first to position themselves as mediators between Europe and China forcing both to realize that neither of them was the center of the world, something that Frainas-Maitre calls "the first moment of mutual relativism." This attempt at acknowledging some kind of "mutual relativism," I argue, can also be observed in modern female autobiography. When the Chinese women writers narrated their life accounts, they envisaged themselves as mediators between China and the West. Their autobiographies can be therefore viewed as a counter-attempt to relate their own life experience to Western realities and shift the power balance between the two world regions by improving the basic images of China that received more and more negative connotation in the 19th century.

4.4. China as an Image of Backwardness and Weakness through the Lens of 19th Century Missionaries and Diplomats

The Jesuit awareness of the relativity of each other's cultures took a new turn during the late 18th and 19th centuries when Protestant missionaries and diplomats from Britain, America and other Western powers arrived in China. The spell of admiration and appreciation of China was broken, and new reactions to what the Jesuits saw as China's minor imperfections (the lack of the right religion and scientific approach) asserted themselves in the opinions of Western observers. New major image formulators succeeded in a total stop of fascination and praise of China and its arts and handicrafts. The West was changing and these changes were echoed in the new rhetoric that narratives about China now contained. For many centuries, when China indeed was the West's superior in many respects, China and the West met on Chinese terms. However the inevitable decline of the Qing dynasty in the nineteenth century and the simultaneous beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Europe had undermined the power balance between the two regions. Europeans (initially mostly from Britain) now felt entitled to play the dominant role in this relationship. As foreign trade became more than ever the key to prosperity, a growing number of diplomatic missions was sent to China to negotiate the terms of trade. The China they saw and described was "corrupt," "old and crazy," "retrograde," "a nation of the eternal standstill" (Gregory, 2003:118-119). Their description announces a tremendous shift and change in vocabulary along with changing attitudes towards China and the Chinese.

Gradually the newcomers became more and more convinced of the unparalleled superiority of the Western world. This position allowed the new missionaries to set new standards for what a dynamic, scientifically advanced civilization was supposed to look like and make a call for China's salvation through the moral regeneration of its people. Thus, once again, a distorted image of China began to take shape. The new frame of negatively-charged images, which presented China as backwards, stagnant, superstitious, and inhabited by immoral people, allowed the Protestant missionaries to justify their own missions to China and position themselves not only as the disseminators of Christianity but also as educators for China's population which was hopelessly stuck in the darkness. In a short book for young readers *China and its People* (1868), a missionary's wife notes that "there is one strange thing about the Chinese – they do not improve; they are nearly the same now as they were 2000 years ago" (Aunt Helen, 1868:20). Such *du haut en bas* missionaries' and diplomats' attitudes towards China that they diligently colored their writing with

had tremendous implications for China. In image-formulating works such as *The Middle Kingdom* (1913, first published in 1851) or *Chinese Characteristics* (1900) written by Samuel Wells Williams (1812-1884) and Arthur H. Smith (1845-1932), respectively, these missionaries present negative traits of Chinese character and ridicule everything that is peculiar to it. Thus Williams addresses some vicious habits of Chinese men such as gambling and opium-smoking holding the custom of "separation of the sexes" (Williams, 1913:783) responsible for this behavior:

> The separation of sexes modifies and debases the amusement, even the most moral, leads the men to spend their time in gambling, devote it to the pleasures of the table, or dawdle it away when the demands in business, study, or labor do not arouse them (Williams, 1913:783).

And furthermore, framing a Chinese man as "unacquainted with the intellectual enjoyments found in books and the conversation of learned men, and having no educated taste," Williams concludes that the only resort for the Chinese man is "the dice-box, the opium-pipe, or the brothel for his pleasures" (Williams, 1913:784). Smith, on the other side, exposes Chinese character in a manner that ridicules the Chinese people's manner of conduct, their customs and their nature. What is especially noteworthy is that a man like Smith, showing contempt towards some of Chinese manners and obviously finding them distasteful, strange and unintelligible for a Westerner like him, portrayed the Chinese as being the ones who treated Westerners with contempt:

> Foreign inability to do what any ordinary Chinese can do with the greatest ease, leads the Chinese to look down upon us. We cannot eat what they eat, we cannot bear the sun, we cannot sleep in a crowd, in a noise, nor without air to breathe. We cannot scull one of their boats, nor can we cry "Yi! Yi!" to one of their mule-teams in such a way that the animals will do anything that we desire (Smith, 1900:102).

Among other characteristics that Smith so painstakingly enumerates in his book are: "the complete ignorance of the laws of hygiene which characterizes almost all Chinese, and their apparent contempt for those laws even when apprehended" (Ibid., 148), "their lack of sympathy" (Ibid., 196), "unwillingness to give help to others unless there is some special reason for doing so" (Ibid., 207). Also women are mentioned in negative terms as, for example, "daughters in China are from the beginning of their existence more or less unwelcome," (Ibid., 199) or "the lot of Chinese concubines is one exceeding bitterness" (Ibid., 202).

Framing the Chinese in a very unfavorable light, Williams' and Smith's books were not the only representative studies on China. Among writings by the diplomats, who were often people with serious intentions to study China, its people and its language, there were many works, some of them pioneering. For example, Mackerras notes that works of Natalis Rondot of a French mission "included comments on many aspects of Chinese society, such as infanticide" (Mackerras, 1989:53);

Gustaaf Schlegel (1840-1903) of a Dutch mission, whose area was law, contributed with "a pioneering essay on prostitution" (Ibid., p.53) and Jan Jacob Maria de Groot (1854-1921) of a Dutch mission produced a major work on religion. The latter work's tone is arrogant and patronizing. In his study of the Chinese religion de Groot demonstrates how he comes to a conclusion that "China's religion is a broad system of polytheism and demonism" which is "the lowest form for religion" (de Groot, 1910:34). The harm such religion does upon the Chinese people being "a source of ethics and moral education" (Ibid., p. 34) is therefore obvious for de Groot. He considers it his duty to convince his readers of the primitivism of the Chinese civilization and consciously makes an attempt to reframe images:

> A religion in which the fear of devils performs so great a part that they are even worshiped and sacrificed to, certainly represents religion in a low stage. It is strange to see such a religion prevail among a nation so highly civilized as China is generally supposed to be; and does it not compel us to subject our high ideas of that civilization to some revision? No doubt we ought to rid ourselves a little of the conception urged upon us by enthusiastic friends of China, that her religion stands high enough to want no foreign religion to supplant it (de Groot, 1910:60).

Although the majority of such works were condescending representations of Chinese realities, there were also examples of works where authors defend Chinese characteristics and customs, as in writings of a British author, Thomas Taylor Meadows, who served as an interpreter in the British consulate in Guangzhou in the 1840s and 50s. In his book *The Chinese and their Rebellions* (1856) he devotes a chapter to a description of the Chinese character and expresses strong condemnation of some other authors' work[10] that views Chinese as "destitute of religious feelings and beliefs," "skeptical and indifferent to everything that concerns the moral side of man," "having no energy except for amassing money," and "absorbed in material interests" (Meadows, 1856:64). Arguing that, although the Chinese do have flaws and weaknesses, Meadows insists that "these vices and faults are mostly identical in kind with those existing among Occidental nations, and are not more prevalent in degree" (Ibid., p. 65). He elaborates:

> And this is my position. I do not simply admit, I assert myself, as the result of a long independent study and close observation, that the great mass of the Chinese are most certainly "sunk in material interests," "pursuing with ardour only wealth and material enjoyments;" just as are the great mass of English, French, and Americans (Meadows, 1856:65).

[10] Meadows critically reads here among others the work of French sinologist Évariste Huc (1813-1860) *L'Empire Chinois* (1854) where, as Meadows sarcastically notes, Huc continues repeating the same old errors about China in spite of "the superior advantages which his knowledge of the Chinese language, joined to twelve or fourteen years' residence in China, gives him" (Meadows, 1856:50).

However this view clearly did not become mainstream. Among the wide range of particular views of China during the 19th century, the more negative images seem to have laid down a foundation of the stereotyping of Chinese character, society and its administration.

Missionaries, journalists and government officials also put much effort into the covering of decisive events in China. The Taiping Uprising is a good example. It was a radical political and religious upheaval led by a Chinese failed scholar who believed himself to be the son of God and a younger brother of Jesus.[11] The above-mentioned author and interpreter, Thomas Taylor Meadows, dedicated a large portion of his book to the Taipings, where he meticulously narrated the origins, the rising and the fall of the rebellion (Meadows, 1856:74-463, which cover chapters VI-XX). Initially the upheaval was met with mixed feelings in the West: some saw it as just another rebellion while others hoped the Taipings would provide a new political and religious climate in China (Mackerras, 1989:62) which would allow a freer commercial and diplomatic interaction as well as a more tolerant attitude towards Christian missionaries and their cause. Only when the Taiping forces endangered the treaty ports, did the Westerners realize how the situation could affect them and provided troops for support of the Qing Dynasty's cause. The way the outcome of the Taiping Uprising was recorded in *Chambers's Encyclopædia* (1874:822) is as follows: "after a series of wasteful and revolting barbarities, it was finally suppressed in 1865 by the imperial troops, led by British and American officers" (Cited in Mackerras, 1989:64). Using derogative rhetoric when describing the uprising as "barbarous," this entry aims at positioning the West as the superior of China providing a frame of the technologically and militarily advanced West. Also this time, the Western narrative was full of negative vocabulary which strengthened the common perception of China as less worthy than the West.

The nineteenth century witnessed a long series of other humiliating events for China besides the Taiping Uprising. The defeat in the Opium Wars[12] resulted in the treaty system that made China lose face in front of the whole world and had a degrading effect on China's self-perception and the Western perception of China as well. The defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) demonstrated China's military weakness to the world and became a major blow to China's self-perception as a former dominant power in Asia. Furthermore, the Boxer Rebellion (1898-1900),[13] which was an anti-foreign and anti-Christian movement, provided the West with images of Chinese

[11] For more details about Taiping Uprising, see Spence (1996).
[12] For recent scholarship on this topic, see Lovell (2011).
[13] For details, see Cohen (1997).

that confirmed the worst fears of the Westerners. China was painted as cruel, treacherous and xenophobic. Chinese criminal law especially appalled Western observers.

In his travel account, George Morrison (1862-1920) narrates of the horrible death of an adulterous wife who was sentenced to die in a cage and a man who had murdered two travelers and for this was hung on the gate "nailed with red-hot nails hammered through his wrists above the hands" (Morrison, 1895:103). Elaborating his narrative he states that "no people are more cruel in their punishments than the Chinese" (Ibid., p. 103) and that the murder's punishment by hanging from the wrists was not even "too severe" (Ibid., p. 103). By this he indicated that there existed even more abominable punishments for crimes. Such accounts contributed to creating a horrifying image of the Chinese death penalty called *lingchi chusi* 凌迟处死. Translated as "death by a thousand cuts," "death by slicing," or "the lingering death," none of these translations was an accurate description of the process as Timothy Brook claims in his fascinating study, *Death by a Thousand Cuts* (2008). This image of punishment and torture and the concomitant vocabulary were used both in fiction and in journalistic reports. As Brook elaborates:

> To be sure, constructing the imagery of Chinese torture at the turn of the twentieth century was by no means the work of just one novelist. The outbreak of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 inspired a surge of sensational reports and images linking China with tortures and wartime atrocities. Newspapers across the Western world were filled that summer with shocking gruesome stories on the theme of Chinese cruelty, as the governments of the major Western powers and Japan readied their militaries for intervention and then proceeded to occupation (Brook, 2008:153).

The high involvement of the Western world in Chinese affairs during the span of the nineteenth century, forcing China into wars, imposing trade conditions and missionaries' activities of conversion and education among the Chinese population created horrifying images of traditional Chinese practices and served to enhance awareness of China in Europe and in America in thoroughly negative terms.

At the same time, the intellectual elite of China was forced to initiate activities to try to rethink traditional values and improve China's image after several decades of public humiliations.[14] These perceived humiliations gave rise to the label of the "Sick Man of Asia" (*Dongya bingfu* 东亚病夫). Coined by an influential Chinese translator of Western literature Yan Fu 严复 (1854-1921)

[14] At the time when Western learning gained momentum, Chinese intellectuals, many of whom were educated overseas in Japan, America and Europe, took it as a proper model for science and modern institutions. For discussion of the activities initiated by the Chinese intellectuals at the end of the 19th century, see Reynolds (1991:47-48); Elman (1999:99, 112-113).

in 1895,[15] this term was quickly picked up in the West and consequently used in tandem with the "Sick Man of Europe," a label that had been applied to the declining Ottoman empire in Turkey (Scott, 2008:9).

If the "sick man" label framed China as weak, incapable of modernization and progress, another well-known label – "the Yellow Peril" (*Huanghuo* 黄祸) - was coined when the West found itself standing face to face with the Chinese immigrants. When they fled the country in large numbers after the Opium wars and arrived mainly in America, but also in Canada and Australia, in hope of a better future, the Chinese immigrants were initially welcomed as cheap labor. However, quickly new kinds of derogatory and racist stereotypes were formed as Americans viewed those Chinese barbarous pagans as devoid of moral principles (Gregory, 2003: 124) and as a threat to Western norms and values. Thus the Yellow Peril label was meant to plant the seeds of anxiety in Western people's minds about what would happen if the "sleeping giant"[16] of China would wake up.

The above examples show how temporal and spatial context, selective appropriation and labeling – all the criteria which Baker claimed to be characteristic of the process of framing – could work in practice. Taking the specific situation in the world when China came to its knees after its defeat in the Opium wars and a part of its population attempted to escape the miserable fate of the defeated nation, we can trace how the host countries in the West picked out certain images of the Chinese along with a certain range of vocabulary and constructed a whole new frame for viewing the Chinese immigrants. Focusing only on negative aspects and characteristics of the people who came from China to try their luck in America, such as on their religious (or irreligious) practice, alleged immoral behavior, unsanitary conditions in Chinatowns, Americans could allow themselves to see Chinese immigrants as a threat. When this threat received a name – Yellow Peril – a label was coined. As this term became accepted as what Said calls "a figure of speech," (Said, 1995:21)

[15]Having compared China with a sick man in his essay "Yuanqiang" [On the origins of national strength] (1895), Yan Fu created an image of China that consequently became a label widely used by foreigners and, perhaps, therefore was perceived as a phrase coined by them. See Xu (2008:18-19).

[16] A popular belief attributes this term, albeit with a slightly different wording ("a sleeping dragon") to the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. While both "giant" and "dragon" are often used interchangeably to describe China, there is no unanimous agreement on which word of the two was actually said by Napoleon. Thus, for the use of term "sleeping dragon," see Hodge and Louie (1998:1), Muni and Yong (1999:66) or Cao, Tian and Chilton (2014:1). On the origin of the term "sleeping giant," see David Scott (2008) who comments on Napoleon's "apocryphal warning" which goes as follows: "China is a sleeping giant. Let her lie and sleep, for when she awakens she will shake the world." (Scott, 2008:26). Whatever the original wording, "a sleeping dragon/giant" became a label of China readily used in journals and books to the present day (Ibid., p. 26).

and Americans and other Westerners got used to coloring their narratives with it, an artificial construction was created, a representation of the Chinese as a threat which had little to do with reality.

4.5. China's Images Adjusted: Academics' and Intellectuals' View of China at the Beginning of the 20th Century

With the greater exposure of China to the West through the second half of the 19th century, the beginning of the 20th century saw a dramatic increase in the volume of Western literature about China. Missionaries, diplomats, travelers, journalists and military men left autobiographical accounts of their encounters with China.[17] Also fiction writers who or lived in China for long periods of time, or even born there, contributed to the formulation of China's images. At the same time, a number of European universities saw the emergence of departments of Chinese studies where academics began to express their opinions and perceptions of China. Thus these groups of Westerners initiated a new step in Western image-formulation of China adjusting their narrative frame to the demands of the new century. The same time can also be characterized by the emergence of the new group of young Chinese intellectuals who themselves began the process of formulating images of China for the West. The interaction between these two groups of intellectuals laid down the beginnings for cross-cultural communication which Chinese women writers would later feel the urge to contribute to with their autobiographical narratives. This section is therefore divided into the two image-formulating camps: the Westerners and the Chinese themselves.

The Chinese women writers, whose autobiographical images come under scrutiny in the following chapters, virtually belong to the "second camp" of image- formulators in the 20th century. Being born shortly before or after the turn of the 20th century, these women were probably most influenced by the kind of images the West portrayed of China during the beginning of the 20th century when they came of age. Therefore I find it quite appropriate to dwell on the formulation of these images in somewhat greater detail than those outlined above.

[17] See Sarah Conger's *Letters from China* (1909), A. Henry Savage Landor's *China and the Allies* (1901), Herbert A. Giles's *China and the Chinese* (1902), *Religions of Ancient China* (1906), George E. Morrison's *An Australian in China* (1895), Isaac Headland*'s China's New Day* (1912), Carl Crow's *The Travelers Handbook for China* (1913), and Norman Hinsdale Pitman's *A Chinese Wonder Book* (1919).

Although this period provided a very wide range of images of China and the Chinese, both negative and, to some degree, more tolerant if not directly positive, the public opinion of China seen from the West grew more and more sympathetic to the struggle China found itself in. Western academia, anticipating changes in Chinese society, launched a trend of viewing and discussing China in a more positive light. Represented by such prominent sinologists as H. A. Giles, Daniel Harrison Kulp II, or Edwin Harvey, the academic image-formulating activities supplied the West with new authoritative views of China.

Herbert Giles, a former British diplomat, who compiled a Chinese-English Dictionary, is also known as one of the creators of the Wade-Giles transcription system that was used until the invention of Pinyin and is still used in some places. His position towards China and towards Western misrepresentations of its traditions and customs cannot be clearer than in the preface to his book *Historic China, And Other Sketches* (1875):

> It seems to be generally believed that the Chinese, as a nation, are an immoral, degraded race; that they are utterly dishonest, cruel, and in every way depraved; that opium, a more terrible scourge than gin, is now working frightful ravages in their midst; and that only the forcible diffusion of Christianity can save the Empire from speedy and overwhelming ruin. An experience of eight years has taught me that, with all their faults, the Chinese are a hardworking, sober, and happy people, occupying an intermediate place between the wealth and culture, the vice and misery of the West (Giles, 1875:4).

In another book he emphasized the usefulness of Chinese studies:

> The importance, as a factor in the sum of human affairs, of this vast nation, - of its language, of its literature, of its religions, of its history, of its manners and customs, - goes therefore without saying. Yet a serious attention of to China and her affairs is of very recent growth (Giles, 1902:4).

Also the list of Chinese books that Giles claims the Cambridge University library had in its possession by 1902,[18] cannot but impress one with the amount and variety of subjects that they cover. Every aspect of Chinese writing seems to be represented: from the Chinese Confucian canon, dynastic histories, exemplary biographies, works of philosophers to books containing poetry, novels, and plays (Giles, 1902:38-73). The fact that such a collection of Chinese books existed at a foreign university library by the turn of the 19th century not only confirms the genuine interest of Western scholarship in China, but also frames the Chinese as a highly cultivated people. Giles's comment leaves no doubt that he was of this opinion:

[18] See Giles' chapter 2 in *China and the Chinese*, which is solely devoted to the description of the Chinese library at Cambridge University.

> To those who have followed me so far, it must, I hope, be clear that, whatever the Chinese may be, they are above all a literary people. They have cultivated literature as no other peope ever has done, and they cultivate it still (Giles, 1902:72).

Moreover, dedicating his book to the Chinese, he could not help addressing a very debatable issue of Chinese women or, to be more precise, female seclusion and infanticide. Giles is convinced that "the position of women still seems to be very widely misunderstood" (Giles, 1902:189). He criticizes especially two female travelers, Miss Gordon Cumming and Mrs. Bird-Bishop and a Jesuit missionary (Ibid., p. 192) for creating false images, creating the charge of infanticide confined to girls due to parents' alleged preference of male children. Giles argues that infanticide "is not more prevalent in China than in the Christian communities of the West" (Ibid., p.194) and brings a reasonable doubt to the widely believed postulate about the lesser value of girls in the family by asking his reader a question: "Sons are no doubt preferred; but is that feeling particular to the Chinese?"(Ibid., p. 194). In arguing like this he dismantles the stereotypes that other foreigners like him had created and offers a new frame of viewing China and the Chinese.

A slightly less enthusiastic, albeit an optimistic view of China's future was expressed in the works of Kulp (1925) and Harvey (1933). As Mackerras observes, although the views that Kulp and Harvey shared about China were inevitably "filtered through the spectacles of American liberal capitalism" which served as a frame for the portrayal of China, Harvey's attempt at developing "communication between the Chinese and American worlds" (Mackerras, 1989:72) indicated the willingness of the West to engage in a more productive relationship if not on equal terms then acknowledging each other as communicating partners.

Such communicational activity saw new heights when yet other groups of Westerners positioned themselves as major image-formulators. A number of Western intellectuals, philosophers and activists took on shorter or longer trips to China, among whom were such philosophers as John Dewey (1859-1952) and Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), scientist Albert Einstein (1879-1955), nurse and birth-control activist Margaret Sanger (1879-1966). Dewey, Russell and Tagore were on longer lecture tours in China at the beginning of the 1920's during which they presented ideas that captured the imagination of the new and developing intellectual Chinese elite.[19] This was probably to be expected, as many members of that

[19] On the academic and popular lectures that Western thinkers delivered during their lecture tours in China, see Chow (1960:191-3). These public talks which "became a vogue in China after 1919" (Chow, 1960:191) were sponsored by Liang Qichao who organized lectures for distinguished Chinese and foreign scholars through the Society for Lectures on New Learning (Ibid., p. 192).

elite segment had been educated abroad. Nonetheless, in spite of the differences in their approach to China – Dewey propagated modern education, Russell showed a great fondness for the traditional aspects of Chinese culture, Tagore deeply sympathized with China and was its great admirer - these prominent Westerners viewed China in a new more sympathetic light, devoid of the hateful and derogatory rhetoric that was so characteristic of the West of the 19th century.

This period was also characterized by the changing angle of missionaries' activity. From being advocators of Christianity alone they became advocators of education. As Cui Dan demonstrates with the example of British Protestant missionaries, the evangelical activities in China which bore only little success during the nineteenth century were in the 1920's replaced by "a social gospel spirit" (Cui, 2001:137). This meant a higher involvement of missionaries in "a range of social welfare activities, including education" (Ibid., p. 137). Hence, the role of image-formulators went to yet another group of Westerners who replaced the missionaries who had actively played their part since the first Jesuits attempted to portray China. The journalists' voice took over from missionaries and became the new creator of the Western images of China and the Chinese. The most famous representatives of this group are American journalists such as Carl Crow (1884–1945),[20] Agnes Smedley (1892-1950),[21] and Edgar Snow (1905-1972),[22] to name just a few. While Crow arrived to Shanghai in 1911 around the time of the fall of the last Chinese dynasty, both Smedley and Snow made their acquaintance with China almost two decades later. The late 1920's were marked by several years of power struggle between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese Nationalist Party (GMD). By 1928 the latter had taken control over China and expelled the CCP. However, already in 1931 the CCP resurfaced in Jiangxi province and proclaimed a Chinese Soviet Republic.[23] It was this kind of China that Smedly described in her book *China's Red Army Marches* (1934), and Snow portrayed in his *Red Star Over China* (1937). Hence, the journalistic images that Crow conveyed at the beginning of the century were very different from the images available to Smedley and Snow in the 1930s. Jerry Israel in his study of shifting American journalistic perceptions of China observes:

[20] Carl Crow was a prolific writer on China and Chinese matters. For a list of his books, see bibliography. For his biography, see French (2006).
[21] Smedley also wrote several books on China, see bibliography. For her excellent biographical portrait, see Price (2004).
[22] Edgar Snow's most famous and influential book is *Red Star Over China* (1937). However, apart from his journalistic endeavors, he functioned as the editor for a collection of short stories written by modern Chinese writers, see *Living China* (1936). For Snow's biography, see Hamilton (2003).
[23] For detailed overview of this period in China's history, see Dillon (2012:188-227).

> [A]s there would be two China's in the midtwentieth century, so there were two journalistic American images of China. Carl Crow's work serves as a mirror into the China of the Open Door while Edgar Snow's writing moves closer to the China of the Cold War. Crow's China was the treaty-port Shanghai. His Chinese were wise and westernized. Snow's China was the caves of Yenan (Yan'an). His Chinese were red and revolutionary (Israel, 1991:149).

Just how journalists portrayed China and its people depended on what people they met on their way. The Chinese that Crow came into contact with at the beginning of the twentieth century were Shanghai inhabitants. The common denominator here is "Shanghai," a city that was a treaty port and international in every way. Hence the Chinese he depicted were much different from Snow's and much less well-known to the West. In his first book *The Travelers' Handbook for China* Crow's main objective seems to be the dismantling of a prevailing Western myth about the uncomfortability of trips to China. He opens his travel guide as follows:

> No doubt a great many well informed people today think of China as a place which can only be visited by one who is willing to forego the comforts to which he is accustomed, and accommodate himself to Chinese customs and primitive facilities for travel. That is true of a great part of the country, but the points of interest which the average traveler would care to visit, may be reached as comfortably as in any other country (Crow, 1913:1).

On a comfortable journey to China that Crow promises as possible indeed a traveler would meet very cheap Chinese servants who are "patient and industrious and soon learn to anticipate the wants of their employers" (Crow, 1913:14), "cheerful rickshaw coolies" who would do anything to cheat a stranger (Ibid., p. 15) and shopkeepers who "expect to sell for as high a price as possible" (Ibid., p.7). The Chinese women that he describes are socially inferior. However he demonstrates that this position is no inhibition to Chinese women's real power:

> low as the social position of the Chinese woman may be, there is no reason to believe that her influence is any less powerful in China than elsewhere. What she is denied by social usage, she gains by her woman's wits, and the real rulers of millions of families in China are the supposedly down trodden wives (Crow, 1913:57).

In his later book he, furthermore, tries to convince his readers of how pleasant Chinese people are, claiming that he discovered some features about China and the Chinese that other travelers have failed to observe thus claiming that he will give "a new understanding of the interesting, exasperating, puzzling, and, almost always, lovable Chinese people as I have known them" (Crow, 1937:14).

The Chinese that Edgar Snow met on his way were of a different kind. They are not described as "lovable" or "interesting," and Snow's travel to the headquarters of the Communists was not "comfortable." For him the Chinese Communists were "the incredibly stubborn warriors (…) who had endured hundreds of battles, blockade, salt shortage, famine, disease, epidemic, and

finaly the Long March of 6,000 miles" (Snow, 1937:36). Hence Snow's portrayal is of the revolutionaries whom he found far away from the treaty-port culture in China's north eastern Shaanxi province. His description of the Long March and his interviews with the leaders of the two conflicting parts, the Communists and Nationalists, included in his *Red Star Over China* made this book the most influential book on China for the West.[24] Moreover, Snow's sketch of Mao is still the most used source for the early life of the Chinese leader. He interviewed Mao in Yan'an and this "autobiographical sketch" has had great impact as almost all biographers refer to it.[25]

In Agnes Smedley's words, the Chinese were "hard brown men, ragged and torn, scarred with a thousand wounds" (Smedley, 1934:16), much similar to Snow's description. Her Chinese, towards whom she feels instinctive loyalty, are the Red soldiers, they are also workers and peasants, men and women who had to endure extreme hardships of poverty and disease. Smedley's Red soldiers who marched through the mountains of Jiangxi "wounded and sick" (Ibid., p. 123), "covered with dirt and lice" (Ibid., p.124) are not "the lovable" and "interesting" Chinese Crow narrated of. As can be seen, the work of these major image-formulating journalists exemplifies how different images of the Chinese could be perceived, portrayed and framed, depending on time, location, historical and social circumstances.

However, American journalists made their name not only by sending home their own reports on China's condition. They also played another important role in bringing the West closer to understanding China when they attempted to act as editors for collections of Chinese writing. Two names can be singled out in this respect: Harold R. Isaacs (1910-1986) and Edgar Snow. In 1934 Isaacs attempted to publish a collection of modern Chinese short stories translated into English under the title *Straw Sandals* that was "designed to give a consecutive picture of the development of the new Chinese literature in the last fifteen years" (Isaacs, 1974:xliii).[26] The stories for this volume, as Isaacs notes, were chosen with the guidance and council of Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936), one of the best known writers of modern Chinese literature, and his associate, Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896-1981), another famous writer in China. Besides the works og these two authors, *Straw Sandals* introduced such central names from the modern Chinese literary scene as Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978), Yu

[24] On Snow's influence as a chronicler of Chinese communism, see Wilson (1971).
[25] The American Sinologist Stuart Schram in his biography of Mao (1966) claimed that Snow's *Red Star Over China* was "irreplaceable" in discovering and understanding the early years of China's leader (Schram, 1966:10).
[26] This quotation belongs to the original editor's 1934 preface and therefore, the "last fifteen years" should be read as the period spanning from 1919-1934.

Dafu 郁达夫 (1896-1945) and Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904-1986). Thus this volume was supposed to add to the new framework that journalists, academics and fiction writers attempted to construct and to demonstrate that this framework was elaborated in close contact to the Chinese leading writers. However the manuscript was turned down by the editors of every publishing house that Isaacs submitted it to due to the changed political attitude towards Isaacs himself (Isaacs, 1974: xliv). Initially a supporter of the Communist cause, Isaacs developed a conflict with his Communist friends over the exaggerations of Communist claims "about their own policies and achievements" (Isaacs, 1974: xxxix) which he as a journalist could not reconcile himself with. His political position eventually led to him being called an "enemy of the people" (Ibid., p. xliv) and his manuscript was turned down. When it was finally published in 1974, Isaacs reflects in the introduction to this edition upon that time of rejections and the discouragement he felt as he learned that Edgar Snow's (who was perceived as the most arduous supporter of the Communists) collection of Chinese short stories *Living China* was published in 1936 (Isaacs, 1974:xliv).

The volume that Snow had edited and translated was published in London and represented many of the same names as Isaacs' volume. As George E. Taylor says in his review of *Living China* in *Pacific Affairs* (1937): "The purpose of this book is to give those who do not read Chinese an impression, through translation, of modern Chinese revolutionary literature. Such a book is of first-rate importance: Mr. Snow is to be congratulated on his perception of the need and his attempt to supply it" (Taylor, 1937:88-89). The fact that journalists like Isaacs and Snow tried to introduce modern Chinese literature to their home audience can be seen as an attempt at widening knowledge about China. Aware of a quite narrow palette of Chinese images available in the West, these journalists had selected the stories of the most prominent Chinese fiction writers. With this they made an attempt at a democratization of the Chinese images, i.e. a widening of the availability of knowledge about China apart from newspapers, academic circles and politics. That they chose only certain short stories and only by certain writers as representative underscores their position as authorities who could guide the Western reader in matters of which Chinese literary pieces one should know. It can also be said that, in a way, they also constituted "modern Chinese literature" for the foreign readers. However, as Isaacs also wanted to demonstrate, this attempt at representation was done in close cooperation with the Chinese leading writers (Lu Xun and Mao Dun) which shows the willingness of the foreign image formulators of the beginning of 20th century to acknowledge the images of China that were formulated by the Chinese themselves.

The range of images continued to grow since more and more Westerners wrote novels about the Chinese and their lives. Among such novels are those depicting Chinese in China as in Pearl S. Buck's (1892-1973) *The Good Earth* (1931), or depicting the Chinese in the West, such as Sax Rohmer's novels of Fu Manchu, the criminal Chinese mastermind operating in London, (first published in 1913), or even describing Westerners in a plot set in China, using it as a background as in Somerset Maugham's *Painted Veil* (1925) or Mrs. Archibald Little's *A Marriage in China* (1896). Some of these Western authors were born in China as children of missionaries; others lived in China for longer or shorter periods of time during their adult life, or never visited China at all. Nevertheless, all of them operated with the established set of images and labels. Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu, for example, is the main representative of a stereotyped Yellow Peril; Maugham's main characters find themselves in a cholera-infested corner of China, which can be seen as a metaphor that China is sick (the Sick Man of Asia), while Pearl S. Buck's main female character lives in a wealthy house as a slave watching the family disintegrate because of opium smoking, presenting two very powerful images of China enslaved and debilitated due to opium.

Many of the Western writers of this time, claimed to have a unique insight into the lives of real Chinese people simply because they had a greater exposure to China, either growing up or living there for many years. Florence Ayscough (1874-1942) can serve as a fine example of such individuals. Raised in Shanghai in the early 20th century, Ayscough is now regarded as one of the most respected interpreters of Chinese culture.[27] In her book *A Chinese Mirror* (1925) she suggested that China, so often equaled with dead art, literature and archeology, should be approached as a living and virile civilization with ancient traditions. Her book is therefore the vision and interpretation of China the way she sees it: "I have tried to make the country, as I know it, seem a living entity for my readers" (Ayscough, 1925:16). She furthermore claims her interpretation of China to be legitimate and different since her interest for and sympathy with the Chinese are deep genuine (Ibid., p. 18).

Another Western author who felt she understood the essence of China is Pearl S. Buck. Born in China as a daughter of American missionaries, she indisputably had a tremendous insight into the Chinese way of life. She belonged to a group of female writers who framed their own sympathetic view of China during the period of 1918-1949 and could boast of the highest award for

[27] For the insightful exploration of Ayscough's life and writing, see Shen (2012).

her literary achievements – the Nobel Prize for Literature – which she won for her novel *The Good Earth*.

Among other sympathetic viewers of China one can distinguish such female Western writers as Alice Tisdale Hobart, Nora Waln, Emily Hahn and Lady Dorothea Hosie. Just like Ayscough and Buck they assumed roles as educators of the West on behalf of the Chinese people whom they claimed they knew best. Sanderson, calling these women "sentimental educators," assigns them an important role in the image-formulation of China and the Chinese. These women writers provided a new and fresh frame for narrating China at a time when the old stereotyping frames still existed and dominated Western views. Sanderson argues that these women's goal, besides the pedagogical one, was "to foster mutual understanding between the peoples of China and the English-speaking world" (Sanderson, 2013:177). Having developed a peculiar sentimental style, these women authors' narratives, he argues, furthermore not only influenced literary portrayals of China for several decades but also opened up for the Western readers' engagement with Chinese women's lives. It is worth noting that this development in literature, which targeted the readers and advocated mutual understanding between East and West, parallels and echoes the ideas of establishing a communication platform that Western academic and missionary communities began formulating around the same time. As Mackerras states: "Communication between Western and Chinese worlds was definitely taking place, though not necessarily only in the direction intended by the Westerners" (Mackerras, 1998:76). This is an important development, as it suggests a new kind of relationship between the two world parts. By allowing China to communicate with the West, albeit still on Western terms and through the eyes of Western authors, the West nonetheless gradually became more open to the idea of the Chinese narrating themselves.

4.6. Chinese Image Formulators for the West

Although the favorable environment for establishing Chinese narrative frames for China probably belongs more to the 20th century when such intellectuals as Hu Shi and Lin Yutang aired their views on China's future for the West, there are also a few examples of earlier attempts at "authentic" portrayals of China. This group of image-formulating individuals probably had much less influence on the Western reader when compared to the group of literary writers from the West discussed above. Nonetheless, their emergence marked an important milestone in changing Western

perceptions of China. No longer was China willing to accept being objectivized and portrayed according to the needs of Western societies. The examples of two male autobiographies of the nineteenth century illustrate this position: Lee Yan Phou's *When I was a Boy in China* (1887) and Yung Wing's *My Life in China and America* (1909). Both narratives are among the earliest representations of China and the Chinese by Chinese immigrants in America. Written in English, these autobiographies targeted the Western audience with a very specific agenda in mind – to explain the real and authentic China to English-speaking readers and to challenge the stereotyping and negative picture that the Americans had of the Chinese immigrants. As Lee notes:

> I still continually find false ideas in America concerning Chinese customs, manners, and institutions. Small blame to the people at large, who have no means of learning the truth except through newspapers or accounts of travelers who do not understand what they see in passing through our country. From the time of Sir John Mandeville, travellers (with a few noble exceptions) have vied with each other in relating the most wonderful stories about our ancient empire. Accordingly, what I tell in this series of articles about Chinese customs, manners, and institutions may often contradict general belief (Lee, 1887:41).

In his autobiography, which reads less as a personal journey and more as a painstaking explanation and interpretation of Chinese etiquette and mores, Lee treats such topics as Chinese cookery and a typical Chinese household, Chinese games and pastimes, religion, school life and holidays. Also a few chapters are dedicated to his first acquaintance with America where he arrived at the end of the 19th century as a student sent on a scholarship from the Chinese government.

Among the strongest passages in his narrative is the chapter called "Girls of My Acquaintance," where he dispels the myth about killings of girls as infants because they are not wanted in their family: "I am indignant that there should be a popular belief in America that Chinese girls are generally put to death because they are not wanted by their parents. Nothing can be further from the truth" (Lee, 1887:43). He also dismisses the usual representation of Chinese women in the West as "languishing in their apartments and contemplating with tearful eyes the walls that confine them" (Ibid., p. 49). Instead he insists that, although Chinese ladies might not have as much liberty as some of the American girls, "they are not kept under lock and key" and can make visits, see theatre performances, go sightseeing, visit their neighbors and be otherwise sociable. The only restriction is that these activities cannot include young men. The latter point Lee does not have any objections to, as these are the conditions that he grew up with and had always considered appropriate. Hence, Lee's autobiographical account shows that the Chinese began to offer what in their eyes were authentic images of China and its people already at the end of the 19th century. Breaking Western stereotypes, this narrative does it bluntly, directly pointing at the

perceptions that misrepresent China and substituting them with the ones that supposedly present a more correct picture.

Yung Wing's autobiography is more self-oriented than Lee's. It concentrates on his own achievements and life path spanning from the time of his birth in 1828 until 1898. Having become the first Chinese graduate of Yale University he worked for establishing the Chinese Educational Mission, which was an attempt to persuade the Chinese government to send 120 Chinese boys to study science and engineering in America. It was this mission that later allowed Yan Phou Lee to go to America to study.

While the above narratives belong to the genre of autobiographical writing and are authored by men, there is also an example of a female writer who, approximately at the same period, wrote essays, short fiction, and journalistic articles. Sui Sin Far (1865-1914) was born to a Chinese mother and an English father and lived in North America. Therefore she cannot exactly be called a native Chinese. However, her stories and essays are the first examples that reflect the experiences of an Asian North American who looks different from the natives and therefore is subjected to the stereotypes, labels and prejudices circulating at the time (Ling and White-Parks, 1995:2). Initiating a dialogue between Chinese and North Americans, Sui Sin Far with her writings not only broke down "the stereotypes of silence, invisibility, and 'bachelor societies' that have ignored small but present female populations" (Ibid., p.6) of female Asian American writers, but launched a different kind of literature that foregrounded a sincere and compassionate description of North American Chinatowns which stood in sharp contrast to the sinophobic "yellow peril" mode of writing.

These were only the first attempts at interpreting Chinese images for the American readership. Later, at the beginning of the 20th century, many groups of Chinese young men and later also young girls received an opportunity to study across the ocean in America and Europe. Many of them became avid interpreters of Chinese culture for the West. Hu Shi, who received his education in the United States at Cornell and Columbia Universities from 1910-1917, published articles, speeches and academic essays in English,[28] among which were his thoughts on literary revolution and language reform, the rights and place of women in Chinese society, as well as Chinese art and philosophy. In his 1931 essay "Women's Place in Chinese History," which he delivered for the American Association of University Women in Tientsin, Hu actively battled the common perception of women's place:

[28] See Hu (2013).

> There is a general impression that the Chinese woman has always occupied a very low place in Chinese society. The object of this paper, however, is to try to tell a different story, to show that, in spite of the traditional oppression, the Chinese woman has been able to establish for herself a position that we must regard as a fairly exalted one. If there is a moral to this story, it is that it is simply impossible to suppress women – even in China (Hu, 1992:3).

In spite of the fact that Hu Shi has been awarded the title of being one of the most significant leading intellectuals of his time (Qian, 2011:73), it was not him but Lin Yutang who received the credit for being the Chinese major interpreter of China's images for the West. Although among Hu Shi's essays in English were such titles as "The Renaissance in China" where he attempted to introduce "China to the West and the Great Britain to the East" (Hu, 2013:15), "The Civilizations of the East and the West" or "The Exchange of Ideas Between the Occident and the Orient: A Case Study of Cultural Diffusion,"[29] it was Lin Yutang's influential *My Country and My People* that has been credited with setting the new, truthful, more positive tone when portraying the true Chinese character.[30] Lin Yutang's popularity with the Western readership,[31] if compared to Hu Shi's, was due to him addressing a different target group. While Hu Shi spoke mostly to academic circles and political groups, Lin Yutang became a bestselling writer for a much broader reading public having created a new narrative frame that would do more justice to China and allow it to act and portray itself on its own premises.[32]

This list of native Chinese image-formulating individuals could be expanded by many more names, also female. In this respect a *Symposium on Chinese Culture* (1931) can be mentioned. Edited by a former female history professor at Beijing University, Chen Hengzhe (whose autobiography is discussed in Chapter Three), this volume in English was the result of the Kyoto Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations in 1929 and contains 18 essays on almost every conceivable aspect of Chinese culture. Clearly setting the tone for the Western audience, this volume aims at defying the stereotype of Chinese culture as a static one (as Aunt Helen and others had framed it) and insisting that that it cannot but change after being "invaded by the culture from Europe and America" (Chen, 1969:305). Also it was clearly an attempt to provide a publication that

[29] For these and other essays, see Hu (2013).

[30] Pearl S. Buck in the introduction to Lin's book had expressed that his portrayal of China and the Chinese was "the truest, the most profound, the most complete, the most important book yet written about China" (Buck, 1936:xii). It is remarkable that such a contemporary Chinese-American writer as Ha Jin supports Buck's assessment and finds it accurate to the present date. See Ha (2009:15).

[31] For a discussion of Lin's unrivaled literary reputation in the West which was ensured by his "prodigious number of publications in English in the 1930s and 1940s" and by his mode of presentation of Chinese life and culture "through the prism of deeply felt personal experiences," see Liu (2007:15).

[32] Lin Yutang's books in English became best-sellers and earned him a reputation of a "wise and witty" advocate of China and the Chinese way of life. For reference, see bibliography.

dealt with other issues than politics and economic struggles, demonstrating that China can offer images of cultural and scientific dimensions. Among the essays presented in this volume, there are those on Chinese philosophy, painting, literature, music and architecture. Sciences are represented by essays on biology, geology, palæontology and other. Also China's social problems, education and women's issues are given space. While the overall aim for this volume is to demonstrate the "changing culture of China" (Chen, 1969:305) through the depiction of current social problems, there is also another agenda that seeks to emphasize China's potential for achieving "cultural greatness" (Ibid., p. 316) once it had overcome all the urgent and pressuring obstacles on its way.

Thus it can be concluded that both Western and Chinese authors of this period tried to create a more adequate and correct picture of China and its people through their writing, fictional or non-fictional. This trend was accompanied by translation activities undertaken by Western and Chinese academics, journalists and literary writers. Hence already since the end of the 19th century there can be seen examples of translations of famous Chinese philosophical and literary works which belong to old China's cultural heritage. Among the contributors were leading sinologists such as James Legge (1815-1897), Herbert A. Giles, Arthur Waley (1889-1966), Emmanuel-Edouard Chavannes (1865-1918) and others. However, attempts at translating modern works were also made in the 1930s. Among them are the already mentioned volumes of Chinese short stories that were assembled by such journalists as Isaacs and Snow, and a woman soldier Xie Binying's autobiography *Girl Rebel: The Autobiography of Hsieh Pingying* (1936) (translated by Lin Yutang's young daughters).[33] Although the number of translations of Chinese texts into English or other European languages can by no means be compared to the enormous flow of Western literature translated into Chinese at the same period,[34] these writers can be credited with setting new foundations for framing China when its image in the West reached its lowest point.

4.7. Chinese Women's Images in the West

When Chinese intellectuals started making their own attempts to reframe limiting and misrepresentative perceptions of China, Chinese women writers were also among them. They

[33] For a useful overview of Chinese literature that was translated into English, see Idema and Haft (1997:61-70).
[34] On the peculiar phenomenon of a translation boom during the late Qing dynasty, when the enormous amounts of Western literature were rendered and translated into Chinese, see Hu Ying (2000).

appropriated autobiographical genre to deal not only with the general images of China that had been formulated by Western observers but with the unflattering images of Chinese women as well.

Because Chinese women were largely prohibited any social intercourse with men (with exception of their husbands) by the traditional cultural rules, their images rarely found their way into the accounts that male travelers, merchants or missionaries brought home with them. Those that did would portray emperor's concubines (as in Marco Polo's detailed account of Kublai Khan's concubines and the process of their selection)[35] or depict attractive and virtuous wives. The latter group was highly praised by Augustinian priest Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza who believed that Chinese women were 'secret and honest' (Cited in Mackerras, 1989: 26-7), an opinion he had developed as result of their rare appearance in the public. Curiously enough, early mentioning of foot-binding, which would receive such negative treatment in the 19th century, is quite neutral in its judgment of this custom. In the *History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China* published in 1585, Mendoza merely comments on foot-binding as follows: "She who hath the least feet is accounted the gallantest dame" (cited in Mackerras, 1989:26).

One has to wait until the early 19th century in order to find more extensive comments on Chinese women, whose lives began to interest Western observers more and more. This interest might have been provoked by the fact that foreigners hardly ever met them. As J. Spence notes, Macartney, a British diplomat, brought up this subject in his writings during 1793-1974 where he highlighted "the absence of women from Chinese social occasions, and the effects of that exclusion on social life" (Spence, 1998:102).[36] This female absence from social interaction, according to Macartney, affected the behavior of Chinese men who disintegrated into opium addicts and gamblers. However, it is worth remembering that diplomats and merchants who shared similar views and reported on female absence from the social interactions were often forced to live in distant settlements outside the big cities as members of exclusively male communities. No wonder that the frame that these diplomats and traders were able to construct was only that of the absence of women.

This absence, often interpreted as deliberate exclusion, received more and more negative connotations in later Western accounts. Together with these accounts, a growing number of negative images of Chinese women found their way into the descriptions that Westerners presented

[35] On the process of concubine selection for the Mongol Ruler as described by Polo, see Bergreen (2007:138-140).
[36] On Macartney's renderings of his embassy in China, see Macartney (1962).

to their home audience. The images that were rendered in the letters, travelogues and notes ranged from portrayal of women's inequality with their husbands to the description of the appalling treatment women were subjected to. For example, George Ernest Morrison (1862-1920), a traveler from Australia, offers quite violent pictures of Chinese women's lives when he describes such aspects as the sale of girls into slavery in poverty-stricken regions (Morrison, 1895:100), female infanticide (Ibid., p. 101), wife-beating (Ibid., p. 232), and footbinding (p. 14). On the issue of footbinding he comments that the malformations this custom causes to female feet "are in our eyes a very unpleasant deformity" (Ibid., p. 14) but still preferable to the strange beauty ideals of Japanese women. Another traveler, Robert Fortune (1813-1880), is annoyed by the depictions of China as "a kind of fairy-land" (Fortune, 1847:2) in Western nations and sets an objective to prove the truth for himself (Ibid., pp. 3-4). Hence on the matter of seclusion of Chinese women he has the following to say:

> We are generally led to believe that ladies of rank in this country are never seen by visitors. It is quite true that Chinese custom, in this respect, differs entirely from ours; and that the females here, like those of most half civilized or barbarous nations, are kept in the background, and are not considered as on an equality with their husbands. For example, they do not sit at the same table; when a "sing-song" or theatrical performance is got up, they are put in a place out of view, where they can see all that is going on and yet remain unseen. But for all this they are not entirely secluded from society; at least they used frequently to honour me with their presence, and crowd round me with the greatest curiosity (Fortune, 1847:319-20).

Seen in the light of the general negative view of China during this period, it does not come as a surprise that the new portrayals of Chinese women took a negative turn as well and they were now depicted as crippled by foot-binding, (a custom that now is perceived as abominable), beaten, sold into slavery and even killed as newborn. However, the travelers showed also that they were willing to make sure whether the images they learned from previous travelers and missionaries were accurate, thus claiming the originality and veracity of their own observations.

Among Western travelers there were also women whose attitudes were not necessarily as negative as their male counterparts. One of such travelers is Isabella L. Bird Bishop (1831-1904) who was criticized by H. Giles for spreading the images of female infanticide in her public lecture in 1897 (Giles, 1902:192). Nonetheless, prior to the public lecture Giles refers to she wrote down quite different comments of her impressions with "the lower order" (Bishop, 1883:83) of Chinese women whom she perceives as kind in appearance and physically strong. The topic of footbinding is also touched upon, however with no profound judgement or indignant remarks:

> The small-footed women are rarely seen out of doors; but the serving-woman at Mrs Smith's has crippled feet, and I have got her shoes, which are too small for the English baby of four months old! The butler's little

> daughter, aged seven, is having her feet 'bandaged' for the first time, and is in torture, but bears it bravely in the hope of 'getting a rich husband'. The sole of the shoe of a properly diminished foot is about two inches and a half long, but the mother of this suffering infant says, with a quiet air of truth and triumph, that Chinese women suffer less in the process of being crippled than foreign women do from wearing corsets! To these Eastern women the notion of deforming the figure for the sake of appearance only is unintelligible and repulsive (Bishop, 1883:83).

While Bishop tolerates the idea of footbinding in 1883, not all Western women felt the same way. Missionary women, who either went to China following their missionary husbands or on independent female missions, were appalled by this custom and did everything in their power to discourage Chinese men and women from practicing it.[37] It was Mrs. Archibald Little who, despite not being a missionary (her husband was a businessman), came to play a notable role becoming the celebrated founder of an anti-footbinding society. In her book *Intimate China: The Chinese as I Have Seen Them* (1899) she cites letters from female missionaries and oral comments of Western doctors about the despair and horror they feel when seeing or medically attending Chinese girls and women with bound feet (Little, 1899:140-150). In her narrative she provides images of how footbinding facilitates breaking the bones, how toes and feet drop off and how women risk dying due to blood poisoning from infected bound "golden lilies" (Ibid., pp. 134-145). The children that she describes are not "with rosy cheeks like the little girls of England" who can hop, skip and jump. Chinese girls have "great black lines under their eyes, and a special curious paleness" and unable to be physically active: "the poor little things are leaning heavily on a stick somewhat taller than themselves, or carried on a man's back, or sitting sadly crying" (Ibid., 139-140). She therefore announces her own contribution to the anti-footbinding cause:

> In April, 1895, I was happy enough to start the T'ien Tsu Hui, or Natural Feet Society. Up till then foreigners who were not missionaries had done but little, if anything, to prevent footbinding. It was, therefore, quite a joyful surprise to find that pretty well all the Shanghai ladies whom I asked were willing and eager to serve upon the committee" (Little, 1899:149).[38]

Containing 120 pictures, *Intimate China* also provides images of tiny bound feet, with and without a shoe on, by this giving the reader an even more shocking experience.

Although a well-known writer and missionary, Isaac T. Headland (1859-1942) also introduced many pictures of women, including an image of bound feet, to his volume *China's New Day* (1912), his attitudes and portrayals of Chinese women differ to a high degree from the negative

[37] For more details on this topic, see Drucker (1991).

[38] Natural Feet Society *Tianzu hui* 天足会 was not the first anti-footbining society in China. Chinese reformers started organizing anti-footbinding societies on their own much earlier Mrs. Little's attempt. For example, Kang Youwei, the prominent Chinese thinker and reformer of the late Qing dynasty, influenced by Western ideas, started an Unbound Foot Association *Bu Guozu Hui* 不裹足会 in 1883 in Guangzhou. For more on Natural Feet Society, see Whitefield (2008). On history of footbinding, see Ko (2005).

framing of other authors. It is quite clear that he does not approve of footbinding, however, he demonstrates his discontent without using any derogatory adjectives:

> The custom of foot-binding is doubtless a result of the universal desire for small feet. That there is terrible suffering connected with it is evidenced by their proverb, that "For every pair of bound feet there is a bed full of tears." Happily as a result of the influence of the church, the girls' schools, the anti-foot-binding society, and the reform that is sweeping over the country, foot-binding is in disrepute. But women's customs die hard, and the Chinese may be expected to have a constitution or a republic before they have entirely discarded the fashion of foot-binding (Headland, 1912:58).

Indeed, it seems that he is determined to dismantle all the stereotypes about women that have been created by foreigners so far. He is afraid that stereotypes of victimization, suppression, and ignorance of Chinese women would affect American women, giving them "a wrong impression" and making them to feel "pity and contempt for those so downtrodden" (Headland, 1912:45). Therefore it is his objective to

> present the brighter aspects of the life of the Chinese woman and to create a better appreciation of her fine qualities, in order to emphasize the importance of woman's education, training and better equipment in this hour of China's need. Only as we enter sympathetically into her life shall we be able to appreciate the supreme worth of the opportunity that is before the Church to-day in the new accessibility of the Chinese woman (Headland, 1912:45-6).

Headland's attitudes and approach to China and its women can serve as an example of nonjudgmental evaluation of the Chinese society at the time when many stereotypes were created and actively applied. He can also be viewed as a herald of changing attitudes towards China, portraying it in more sympathetic terms.

As the sympathetic attitudes with China and the Chinese women in particular became more and more obvious during the early decades of the 20th century, a new narrative frame began to take shape. Seizing the opportunity to influence a Western audience, the writers and translators of this period claimed that they portrayed "authentic" or "close to real life" images of Chinese women. However, the "real" Chinese woman that they portrayed could be very different depending on their starting point. For Elisabeth Cooper who translated into English a collection of letters of a noble woman, it was a Chinese lady.[39] In the preface to her volume Cooper argued that the images of Chinese women that had been accessible to date were largely of the lower class Chinese women, as the travelers and missionaries only had contact with this group of Chinese. Her worry was that the "real" Chinese woman, who was a lady, remained undiscovered when viewed by foreign observers from the outside. She elaborates as follows:

[39] See Cooper's *My Lady of the Chinese Courtyard* (2004, first published in 1914).

> The tourists see only the coolie woman bearing burdens in the street, trotting along with a couple of heavy baskets swung from her shoulders, or they stop to stare at the neatly dressed mothers sitting on their low stools in the narrow alleyways, patching clothing or fondling their children. They see and hear the boat-women, the women who have the most freedom of any in all China, as they weave their sampans in and out of the crowded traffic on the canals. These same tourists visit the tea-houses and see the gaily dressed "sing-song" girls, or catch a glimpse of a gaudily painted face, carried on the shoulders of her chanting bearers. But the real Chinese woman, with her hopes, her fears, her romances, her children, and her religion, is still undiscovered (Cooper, 2004:x).

While Cooper's "real" Chinese woman is a high-class lady, many other writers of fiction or journalists envisaged images that were quite different. Among these authors are the above-mentioned Pearl S. Buck, Agnes Smedley, Florence Ayscough, Emily Hahn, Alice Tisdale Hobart. Each of them pictured their own Chinese women types and claimed that, since they had had longstanding connections to China, they knew what the "real" Chinese woman was like. Thus Pearl S. Buck's novels were mainly about peasant Chinese women, Smedley's portraits were of women revolutionaries, while Ayscough's imagery range was more versatile encompassing women artists, poets and painters, as well as warriors, and educators.

A curious feature about these authors' portrayal of Chinese women is their seemingly involuntary use of the old stereotypes that had been established in the Western mind for centuries. The main characters in these authors' fiction are the characters who grow up in a world of arranged marriages, opium smoking, among their father's concubines, moving around on their tiny lotus-feet. As Sanderson argues, these stereotypes were used "to conform to longstanding public expectations of what a book about China should contain" (Sanderson, 2013:188). Moreover, he claims that this kind of depiction of Chinese realities was not always against the Western women authors' own inclinations (Ibid., p.188). On the contrary, "stereotypical products of Chineseness were often introduced deliberately in order to demonstrate the contrast between a fading traditional culture and a perhaps less picturesque, but undoubtedly more modern and therefore more comprehensible, present" (Ibid., p. 188).

These writers, in spite of their claims about the "close to real life" portrayal of the realities of life that Chinese women were subjected to, were indeed very much aware that, in order to influence the Western audience, they had to operate with the perceptions and stereotypes about China that were already familiar to their readers. Having found the images in the text that conformed to the expectations that one might have had about China, the reader would probably be much more open to the deviations from the already established standards. This strategy allowed

these writers to open a space that they could use for introducing other modern and unfamiliar images, voicing their sympathies, advocating their ideas.

Educated Chinese men and women of the beginning of the 20th century were highly exposed to Western literature in general but also to Western writing about China. The fact that they felt the need to express their own views about their country and its people suggests that, however truthful and accurate accounts Western authors thought they introduced to their audience, the Chinese themselves thought that the realities of Chinese life were still misrepresented. Such a reaction can be sensed both in Lee Yan Phou's repudiation of stereotypes in his *When I was A Boy in China* and in a review of Pearl S. Buck's *Good Earth* by Chen Hengzhe, who felt that although Buck's China was "astonishingly accurate and convincing" (Chen, 1931:914) nonetheless "the reader cannot help feeling that a portion of Mrs. Buck's knowledge of the Chinese life is only the product of her own imagination" (Ibid., p. 914). Chen Hengzhe seems to appreciate the genuine sympathy that Buck exhibits for the Chinese. However, she argues that "the author of 'The Good Earth' is, after all, a foreigner, who has never mixed with the Chinese more than what is permitted by the relation between the mistress and the amah, or between a student and a tutor" (Ibid., p. 915). For Chen it is Buck's position as a foreigner that prohibits Buck from portraying real individuals and instead allows her to portray her characters merely as types. In this manner Chen Hengzhe voiced China's pressing need to be portrayed by native Chinese like herself who have obtained the "intimate association of minds and hearts" (Ibid., p. 915) and therefore are better fit for authentic portrayal of China and the Chinese people.

5. Appropriation of Western Images by Chinese Women Writers

In their attempt to provide a Western reader with an authentic image of China, which was troubled and challenged, and at the same time portraying themselves as agents who contributed to the changes that China was undergoing at that time, Chinese women writers also needed to juggle or deal with stereotypes. They saw autobiography as the most suited genre for such an expression. However, if they were to target Western audience, they would have to play the game on the West's terms. As the construction of a self-image is strongly influenced by already established norms and standards of the readership, the images that women autobiographers were to formulate not only had

to be comprehensible for the audience but to some degree conform to the expectations about these images as well.

Therefore, the analysis of the autobiographies in later chapters works with a hypothesis that Chinese women autobiographers, just as the above discussed Western authors, would have to use the same strategy in order to reach out to the Western audience and communicate with it in a language and using a vocabulary that it would understand and employing the images that it would find familiar. Turning to this strategy, Chinese women authors opened a transformative space in their readers' consciousness that would become a site for introducing yet other kinds of "authentic" Chinese images to the West, only this time the formulators of these images would be Chinese women writers themselves. Just how authentic and close to the truth those images were constructed is a question for the analysis chapters, meanwhile a conclusion to this chapter is as follows.

This chapter has viewed ever-changing Western attitudes towards China as ways of framing it. Baker's concept of narrative framing, that suggests an active strategy in forming a certain reality, provided the necessary support in assessment of Western attempts to form opinions about China to suit the time-and-space specific needs of the observers. The larger narratives that were constructed about China during the span of many centuries reflected the economic, religious, and political situations that Western countries outside China found themselves in. Framed in positive and negative terms, and given distinct labels through carefully chosen textual or visual imagery and vocabulary, China's position was a static one; it was the one being depicted and interpreted, disgraced and sympathized with. Different groups of men and sometimes women saw themselves as authorities who had the right or necessary knowledge to represent China. Said's concept of representation proved quite useful for determining how Western authors succeeded in creating a certain view of China. An artificial construction, such representation was manifested through the kinds of images, motifs and themes that were chosen to narrate China at different periods: from magnificent and rich, to strange and heathen, from barbarous, dirty and poor, to deserving sympathy and help. Such positions created historically- and socially-contingent stereotypical views of China, which by the turn of the 20th century, met with a counter reaction from native Chinese writers, especially from Chinese intellectual youth influenced by Western ideas of modernization and expressing a wish to represent their country on their own. Although often they had to use the vocabulary and the stereotypes that had been coined before them, they attempted to act as cultural interpreters who could change the Western view of China.

Chapter Two

Female Images in Chinese Literature

1.Introduction

The previous chapter explored the concept of image from the position of narrative framing which implies stereotypical vocabulary with which Western observers labelled China and the Chinese according to the specifics of the historical and social circumstances. While China and the Chinese were stereotyped from the outside by foreigners, Chinese women in particular were also stereotyped from within the Chinese literary tradition by the Chinese literati. Such double definition, by both foreign and domestic image formulators, undoubtedly limited the kind and number of images that were available to Chinese female autobiographers. This chapter examines the concept of image in the form of roles or types found in literary sources in Chinese.

When speaking of Chinese literary characters and Chinese literature in general, however, it should be noted that the term Chinese literature is a highly complex one and differs quite significantly from Western definitions of literature. While the differences between the Western and Chinese perceptions of literature will be addressed later in this chapter, suffice it here to say that, roughly divided into high and low literature, traditionally Chinese writings were considered as either serious and significant or as popular and entertaining.[40] This chapter, then, will first examine the images of women as prescribed by high literature, which can cautiously be equaled with traditional Chinese writings belonging to the Confucian canon. Written by men and for men, these classical works mentioned women from the point of view of their roles within the family. Low literature, represented by stories of supernatural events, tales and, later, also novels presented women as ghosts, shape-shifters, warriors and artists. A distinction between serious and trivial literature suggests that the images of women that are described in classical serious writings are accorded much more weight and value than those of the popular folk tales. Therefore, an insight into how women were portrayed within the Chinese literary tradition and how such portrayals might

[40] For details on how Chinese themselves classified literature into high and trivial or, in other words, true and untrue, see Idema and Haft (1997:52-60).

have affected female self-perception is crucial for understanding and assessing the images or self-characters that Chinese women writers constructed in their modern autobiographies.

When addressing literary characters I find Porter Abbott's approach to narrative particularly useful. For Abbott a literary character is "one of the two principal components" that participate in the construction of most narratives, "the other being the *action*" (Abbott, 2008:130). He furthermore defines narrative as "the representation of events, consisting of *story* and *narrative discourse*; **story** is an *event* or sequence of events (the *action*); and **narrative discourse** is those events as represented" (Abbot, 2008:19). He argues that trying to understand a literary character we as readers "draw upon pre-existing *types* that we have absorbed from our culture and out of which, guided by the narrative, we mentally synthesize, if not the character, something that stands for the character" (Abbott, 2008:116). This idea makes also much sense when applied to writers who, as creators of literary characters, draw upon pre-existing types that they have absorbed from their culture to *select* possible roles for their characters. Following this train of thought would mean viewing Chinese female autobiographers as necessarily drawing upon traditional cultural images of women that were available to them through the domestic narratives about women. Moreover, this would mean viewing female autobiographies as narratives discourses which are carefully constructed in order to represent certain female images that Chinese women selected for themselves. Thus to provide the basis for the mapping of images, or autobiographical identities, which female autobiographers wished to convey (communicate) to their readers, it is essential to explore the types that Chinese women traditionally were divided into and could draw upon.

Although recently a few studies have been made on the images of women in Chinese thought and literature (Li, 1994; Wang R., 2003; Rosenlee, 2006), they do not provide a comprehensive classification or a typology of such images that my analysis could lean on. Therefore, when this chapter examines the imagery range for Chinese women in Chinese literature, it does so through a classification of female roles that was suggested by Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope in their *Who Am I This Time: Female Portraits in British and American Literature* (1976). This anthology takes a useful critical approach to traditional literary analysis by providing a typology of literary portraits of women as heroines and women as heroes (Pearson and Pope, 1976:3). Elaborating their approach Pearson and Pope explain that

> the section on the heroine has three subdivisions – "The Virgin," "The Mistress," and "The Helpmate." These parallel Joseph Campbell's three categories of women – the goddess, the temptress, and the earth mother –

> whom the male hero encounters on his mythical journey. The subdivisions of the section on the hero are "The Sage," "The Artist," and "The Warrior" – the three traditional heroes (Pearson and Pope, 1976:2).

By making such subdivisions they argue that, in spite of the traditional division of literary characters into the gender-based heroines and heroes, female characters, besides playing the traditionally allotted roles of heroines, can very well also assume male qualities. Pearson and Pope thus not only refute the highly stereotypical view of female literary characters as playing only heroine roles but also extend a traditionally accepted range of female literary roles. They argue that this approach not only would "expand and enrich traditional literary analysis" but also "encourage the reader to relate literary portraits to women's actual experience" (Pearson and Pope, 1976:2). Therefore I consider this typology as having a potential to analyze "women's actual experience" expressed through the genre of autobiography. This classification, furthermore, besides providing a useful range of female literary types and roles allotted to them, will be used as a tool for assessing the means which added authority and power to female self-portrayal. As I will demonstrate later, Chinese women autobiographers attempted to take on male roles in order to put weight and authority behind their words and the images they constructed of themselves.

Pearson and Pope's attempt to enlarge the basic range of female literary roles opened up new venues for examining "women's actual experience" within the format of autobiography, which is of particular interest for this project. When Pearson and Pope state that "[w]omen authors are more likely to portray women as heroes, and male authors to portray them as heroines" (Ibid., p. 10), they suggest the existence of a different kind of female behavior, a behavior that men are unaware of because women tend to act differently when men are not around. This statement provides me with an opportunity to suggest a hypothesis that Chinese women writers would most likely attempt to portray themselves acting as heroes in their autobiographies because this genre would allow them to do that without having to encounter a stereotyping male gaze directly. Naturally, to avoid a male gaze completely is not possible as autobiographies as private records of life are bound sooner or later to become public, inviting all kinds of critical and stereotyping gazes. It can be therefore said that to expose oneself through autobiography, on the one hand, takes courage but, on the other hand, a mentality of an achiever who is sure of one's own worthiness. Chinese women writers of the early 20th century embraced the genre of autobiography convinced that their experience was important and representative of the whole generation of Chinese women. Encouraged by both their foreign friends and those at home, women writers used this genre not so much for self-expository reasons as for self-establishing reasons, creating a new type of a Chinese woman. This new type of woman

could attain male characteristics and take a decisive action in presenting herself as an authority who could represent and interpret her country for the West.

Obviously, the kind of self-perception that Chinese women writers acquired in the early twentieth century was helped on its way by the historical circumstances which had allowed women to get education, study abroad and participate in public political and literary debates. When the reformist and intellectual movements ensured women's emergence from the domestic realm, their active participation in public affairs allowed them to create a niche for self-expression, a niche that included autobiography. The self that Chinese women writers decided to present to their readership was shaped by who they were, who they wanted to be and who they could be. The possible perception of their lives was not only shaped by the wide range of stereotypical Western images of China which I dealt with in the previous chapter; powerful literary icons that were imported to China through the translation of Western literature went into the mix along with traditional literary female images of their own culture. Pearson and Pope's classification offers a first step to exploring the mix of images available to Chinese women.

Hence, this chapter proceeds first with a short introduction to Pearson and Pope's typology. Next, on the basis of scholarly readings of Chinese literature, this chapter distinguishes the most common types of Chinese female images which will be tested against the suggested typology. Given the insurmountable volume of existing Chinese literature, this survey necessarily delimits its inquiry to a relatively few central works that could be considered most influential in formulating literary roles for Chinese women. This includes a discussion of the peculiar characteristics of Chinese literature, which had a different historical trajectory from Western literature. The conclusion will discuss the insights gathered from the analysis of Chinese literature as well as the possible need for adjustments to Pearson and Pope's classification of female literary characters to make it a suitable tool for the evaluation and analysis of the images of the female in Chinese literature.

2. Theorizing Literary Characters: Men are Heroes and Women are Heroines?

Before elaborating on the range of female images that Pearson and Pope's classification presents, it needs to be clarified what stereotypical gaze on female literary roles Pearson and Pope call into question and distance themselves from. They claim that "[t]he myths and literary conventions that

have affected women in Western culture from the Anglo-Saxon period in Britain and the colonial period in America to the present" (Pearson and Pope, 1976:2) were meant to stereotype women and suppress their need to search for new and less oppressive and delimitative roles.

Until very recently, it was customary to view only male protagonists as heroes, which left female protagonists with traditionally prescribed roles as heroines. Pearson and Pope argue that it is patriarchal society that bears the responsibility for this restricting inaccuracy in literary terminology and criticism, explaining that: "for some time critics have called male protagonists 'heroes' and 'villains,' and female protagonists 'heroines'" (Pearson and Pope, 1976:4). Providing examples of literature where male protagonists function in supporting roles while women assume the main roles of heroes, Pearson and Pope demonstrate a conceptual difficulty in operating with this restrictive terminological set. The misconception that hero roles are reserved for men and heroine roles for women leads also to a limited number of roles available for female protagonists. In their analysis of literary works Pearson and Pope demonstrate that female protagonists who set out on a path of self-searching, thus performing male roles as heroes, are still called heroines. At the same time, male protagonists who may very well function in supporting roles, which are per definition feminine, are still called heroes. According to Pearson and Pope, this mode of characterization of female and male literary roles have been widely accepted due to the fact that "patriarchal society views women essentially as supporting characters in the drama of life: Men change the world, and women help them" (Pearson and Pope, 1976:4).

One of the scholars who can be considered as having enabled a paradigm in which women characters are seen as passive, acting merely as a supporting role for the male characters is Joseph Campbell (1904-1987).[41] His position on this matter is very clearly stated in the interview he gave to Maureen Murdoch when he claimed that, "In the whole mythological tradition the woman is *there*. All she has to do is to realize that she's the place that people are trying to get to. When a woman realizes what her wonderful character is, she's not going to get messed up with the notion of being pseudo-male" (Murdock, 1990:2). Woman's pursuit of an activity, a journey of her own (which is a male prerogative according to Campbell) is thus perceived as unfeminine and "pseudo-male." When Campbell equals female character with a place, which is static per definition, he deprives her of any action at all and therefore of hero characteristics. Hence, such established perception of typical male and female roles in literature not only sets certain limitations to our

[41] Joseph Campbell is author of the influential book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949).

critical methodology and terminology but also insists on approaching these roles through certain societal sex role patterns.

Female definition through gender ascribed roles can be traced within almost all world societies. China is not an exception. History is filled with examples of how women have been stereotyped and defined by men. Traditionally men were those who held power – political, economic, theological and moral - which gave them the authority to define correct behavior for other men with less power and for women. Literature proved to be one such tool for power demonstration. As Pearson and Pope observe in their anthology: "[l]iterature teaches women 'appropriate' female behavior" (Pearson and Pope, 1976:5). Thus, whether they read fairytales about Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty, D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Ban Zhao's 班昭 (48-116 CE) *Lessons for Women* [*Nüjie* 女诫] or Cao Xueqin's 曹雪芹 (d. 1763) *Dream of the Red Chamber* [*Hong Lou Meng* 红楼梦], women as readers learn to admire the depiction of certain roles which they begin to identify themselves with. The stereotypical female portrayal in the above-mentioned literary works suggests ready pitfalls for continued operation with misrepresentative literary concepts of female literary characters as heroines when assessed in scholarship. Therefore, the classification of female literary characters into six different types as suggested by Pearson and Pope could aid in setting aside the rigid stereotypical division of literary characters into female and male roles and allow a female character to assume a more flexible and versatile position in a literary context. The following section gives a quick overview of Pearson and Pope's typology.

3. Classifying Female Literary Characters

As stated above, Pearson and Pope, besides dividing female literary portraits into two general categories – woman as heroine and woman as hero – further subdivide them into three subcategories: the heroine can be "The Virgin," "The Mistress," and the "The Helpmate", while the hero is either "The Sage," "The Artist," or "The Warrior." The three female subcategories correspond to the three categories of women which Joseph Campbell distinguished in his work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, i.e. the goddess, the temptress and the earth mother. His images of the

male hero go far beyond the three categories suggested above, only one of them overlapping – Hero as Warrior.[42]

3.1. Women as Heroines

The following pages give a short overview of Pearson and Pope's take of the first three heroine roles - "The Virgin," "The Mistress," and the "The Helpmate".

"The Virgin" is described as the ideal woman of Western society, the ideal, which Pearson and Pope hold responsible for the limitations imposed on women's lives. The virgin is chaste and typically portrayed in a positive light as a young girl. She represents "the embodiment of potential which will be realized only through her relationship with a man" (Pearson and Pope, 1976:17). And furthermore: "[t]he concept of woman as potential, waiting to be awakened by a man, discourages the unmarried woman from developing definite qualities, interests, and abilities because these might interfere with her marriageability. (…) Only in and through the relationship with the male and under his supervision is she permitted to develop a self" (Ibid., p. 18).

"The Mistress" represents the transitional stage when a chaste virgin turns into a sexual woman and symbolizes a transition from purity to fertility. The mistress is either a temptress or a fallen woman. If she is powerless and suffering she might be viewed sympathetically, if she takes advantages of her sexual power she is condemned as a seductive temptress who causes men deliberate damage. The sexual woman is morally corrupt and even an innocent sexual woman can be potentially destructive. Pearson and Pope draw a mark of equality between the mistress and the virgin in terms that "she must marry to be socially respectable" (Ibid., p. 60). Leading the life of an unmarried sexual woman leads to her fall because "she is praised and rewarded when she is desirable to men, but if she becomes morally or physically unattractive to men – if she loses her beauty or her hymen – she may be reviled, ridiculed, or pitied" (Ibid., p.60).

"The Helpmate" is the archetypical connection of women with the Great Mother (Pearson and Pope, 1976:98) who, represented by Eve, combines two contradictory roles: giving life to all humankind and bringing sin and death to the world. The helpmate is a wife who integrates the

[42] Other images he provides are: Hero as Lover, as Emperor, as Tyrant, as World Redeemer, as Saint (Campbell, 2012:271-315).

qualities of the virgin and the mistress as both virtuous and sexual. Since all women are expected to be married at some point in life, the helpmate and her ideal qualities are equaled with the qualities of an ideal woman. The helpmate is primarily viewed as "the Other, as a supporting character in a man's drama" (Ibid., p.99) just as the virgin and the mistress. Pearson and Pope argue that because the helpmate is portrayed as the Other, she would not be portrayed realistically, instead either receiving idealistic characteristics of "'good' wife and mother, who embodies the Great Mother's nurturing qualities" or being condemned as "'bad' wife and mother, who destroys her husband and children" (Ibid., p.99).[43] Thus the helpmate has 'no existence apart from her husband's' and is often portrayed as 'lacking a self' (Ibid., p.101). Pearson and Pope give a patriarchal culture full responsibility for the damaging requirements of the helpmate causing her to be "subservient and economically, socially, morally and mentally dependent on her husband" (Ibid., p.105).

Although these three roles can be seen as a natural temporal progression in the heroine's maturing image, the roles of virgin, mistress and helpmate are often contradictory and mutually exclusive. Pearson and Pope argue that it is virtually impossible for a woman to enjoy fulfillment in any of these three roles because the same qualities she is praised for in one role become the center of evil in another. Thus the demand for women to simultaneously play all these roles, which are clearly defined in terms of sex roles, is, mildly put, utopian. Pearson and Pope illustrate this utopia by demonstrating how housewives are encouraged to behave as mistresses in order to keep their husbands' interest in them; how mistresses are there to provide men with sexual enjoyment but should still be unattainable; while virgins are praised for their purity but at the same time are expected to get married and become a sexual woman and an ideal wife.

3.2. Women as Heroes

After this brief outline of the heroine roles, which does little justice to the deep and versatile analysis of these roles by Pearson and Pope, I proceed to their treatment of women in hero roles, which are traditionally male – "The Sage," "The Artist," and "The Warrior."

[43] In Chinese tradition it is the qualities of the *virtuous wife and good mother* that are foregrounded. As Sheng Xiaoming notes: "The ideal woman is summarized in the phrase '*virtuous wife and a good mother*' (*xian qi liang mu*), meaning that the energy and the efforts of a woman should be directed at serving her husband, her family and her children" (Sheng, 2014:104).

"The Sage," according to Pearson and Pope, symbolizes a transition between the heroine and the hero. The sage is defined by "her culture as a heroine, but she has wisdom beyond that of the culture, which labels her a virgin, mistress, or helpmate. That wisdom makes her a hero" (Ibid., p.146). In spite of the fact that the sage has wisdom and understands the world, she does so passively. The sage accepts what happens without reacting or trying to fight against it because she knows that heroic action is futile. Although her psychological growth allows the sage to perceive how "social roles limit and negate a woman's identity and preclude personal fulfillment" (Ibid., p.146) she is still confronted with a realization that she has to play "a series of partial roles in response to male needs, because she is taught to deny her passions and her intellect, and because she is encouraged to disguise her true self and submit her will to that of her husband for life" (Ibid., p.147). The sage's wisdom and knowledge is potentially destructive to patriarchy if she understands what is wrong with this system, but her wisdom is not necessarily something that can be communicated because this wisdom is "alien to her culture or forbidden by it" (Ibid., p.149) or she simply lacks the language to express her knowledge in.

"The Artist" goes one step further if compared to the sage. Besides having superior wisdom she is capable of initiating an artistic action albeit secretly or indirectly. Women's indirect relationship to the artistic process manifests itself in the inspiration they give to male creativity, when they serve as their muses. When they themselves engage in the artistic process as poets, painters and writers, they have to fight "the cultural myth that the fine arts belong only to men" (Ibid., p. 194). The woman artist might therefore feel apologetic for her "presumption in writing poetry," refrain from publishing her works or even hide her identity behind a male pseudonym. Moreover, she is prone to internal conflict (something that does not happen to the male artist) because she has to manage "the selfless role of the heroine and the self-expressive role of the artist" (Ibid., p. 195). The pressure of such inner conflict can result in the woman artist becoming an actress who is forced to put on an act to combine the heroine roles of virgin, mistress, helpmate and mother with the power, strength and wisdom of the male hero. Pearson and Pope very insightfully note that the woman artist becomes the "creator of illusions" and, just like Scheherazade, "may tell stories or transform the world in some other way to control her destiny" (Ibid., p. 196).

"The Warrior" is a culmination of the hero roles as the woman warrior "initiates action that affects the world" (Ibid., p. 243). Pearson and Pope's warrior is, on the one hand, someone who engages in military activities to battle against oppression. On the other hand, warrior is "the

traditional woman in her role as lover, mother, worker, or friend." She is revolutionary in the sense that she "moves beyond her culture's female role definitions and refuses to be dependent on a man" (Ibid., p. 243). Pearson and Pope also argue that "[w]hether a female character is seen as heroic depends on the author's point of view. Women are portrayed as heroes when they are protagonists and when we see the world through their eyes" (Ibid., p. 243). This kind of action is exactly what authors do writing their autobiographies. This also means that any virgin, mistress and wife can be a warrior as long as she is not controlled by her culture's definitions of that role. A woman warrior can be a hero if she chooses to see herself as one. She can even act independently in spite of the restricting and delimitative roles of the virgin, mistress, helpmate, sage and artist because she has received a blessing for this action from a higher authority (like Joan of Arc). Summing up, Pearson and Pope argue that "[l]iterary portraits of the female warrior include those of traditional women who transcend the limitations of their heroine roles and those of revolutionaries who reject those roles" (Ibid., p. 243).

Pearson and Pope demonstrate that female literary characters indeed can play hero roles showing an ability to act "either by choice, accident, or circumstance" (Ibid., p. 9). However, as they argue, by acting as "heroes" women do not (or cannot?) totally discard their traditional heroine roles, instead they add a hero "flavor" to their already existing images as virgins, sexual women or wives and mothers. In spite of the acquired ability to defy through action their definition "exclusively in terms of sex roles," women heroes' attitudes still appear passive or necessitated to take on a disguise, perhaps due to the inability to totally discard the traditional female roles. Pearson and Pope note that the sage and the artist exhibit traits usually attributed to the heroism of traditional women who play heroine roles. The authors describe them as follows: "The sage is heroic because she is wise, but she cannot translate her understanding into productive action. The artist transforms her role, but does so by consciously playing the role of virgin, mistress, or wife" (Ibid., p.9). The only role which, according to Pearson and Pope, seems to refuse to play the secondary part in a male story and initiate a direct action is the warrior. These observations bring the authors to a conclusion that we should be aware "that male heroism and female heroism in a patriarchal society often have taken different forms, corresponding to the restrictions and opportunities afforded to sex" (Ibid., p.10).

Pearson and Pope's attempt to provide a typology of female images that embraces not only portrayals of women as heroines, but also as heroes, suggests that a female character can acquire

some male characteristics and play hero roles. In the following assessment of Chinese female literary characters, Pearson and Pope's classification will provide a valuable range of female images that can be tested against the Chinese images. Although the traditional seclusion of women to their inner chambers suggests that in literature Chinese female images will be portrayed as heroines, there are a few examples of female characters who are portrayed as having masculine characteristics and therefore can be viewed as heroes. In the analysis of the three modern women's autobiographies that follows this chapter I apply Pearson and Pope's suggestion to view women not only as heroines but as heroes as well. The Chinese women autobiographers in question went to lengths to position themselves as possessing male characteristics and qualities and often denying or neglecting the female elements of their being. Placing themselves in the center of their narrative as main characters, portraying themselves as "boys" in behavior, clothing or intellectual ability, these women assumed the roles of heroes of their time, heroes who had an insight into the womanly sphere but were not content to be confined to it.

4. Images in Chinese Writing

After the above brief introduction of the theoretical basis and the categories of analysis, in the following I will present the views of female roles that have been traditionally established in Chinese writing and relate them to the female roles in literature as delineated by Pearson and Pope.

To provide their typology with a solid basis, Pearson and Pope examined a wide range of lyric pieces and prose texts authored by both anonymous and well-known male and female poets and writers. The earliest representative literary text (a piece of Old English love poetry) chosen for their anthology dates from between A.D. 780 and 830 (Pearson and Pope, 1974:106) while some of the latest works are modern prose pieces written in the twentieth century. If just as solid a basis for determining a credible range of Chinese female images was to be established, a thorough review of the Chinese literary sources would be required. This endeavor is connected with many difficulties. The first one would be to establish the timeline for such a search. There are far more literary sources in Chinese dating from prior to the 8th century, which Pearson and Pope determined as the starting point for their inquiry. A curious thing is that the period around the 8th century coincides

with the rise of popular literature (also called Tang tales (*chuanqi* 传奇))[44] in China, therefore, it could be tempting to mark this period as the starting point for my search. However, taking into consideration the sharp distinction that the Chinese made between high and low literature (Idema, 1997:53-60), (popular literature obviously belonging to the latter category), it would be highly problematic to restrict my search only to popular literature. Another problem would be to consider the difficulties that would certainly arise when assessing Chinese literature in Western terms and positioning of the Chinese and Western literary textual practices and genres against each other.

Attention to all these questions has brought quite a few insights into the limitations I necessarily will have to bring upon my analysis in terms of the choice of the sources, arranging the material and developing my argument. The next section will therefore be organized as follows. I will first give a brief outline over what the Chinese themselves defined as their writing canon in order to later raise the question whether it is necessary to search for female images in the ancient texts dating prior to the 7th century which is the approximate date of the earliest literary writing piece that Pearson and Pope assess in their anthology. Then I will attend to the different perceptions of what literature is/was and what kind of works it contains as viewed through the Western and Chinese perspective. Finally I will provide my arguments for the choice of literary sources for my search for female images. Thereafter follows the actual review and assessment of the chosen source texts. The images or the roles that have been assigned to women in these texts will be viewed against Pearson and Pope's typology.

4.1. Defining Chinese Literature

In order to understand and critically evaluate the images that were available for Chinese female writers in the beginning of the twentieth century, it is necessary to acknowledge and appreciate ancient perspectives on women in classical literature which played a central role in Chinese society. It is also essential to determine how the Chinese perceived the concept of literature. The Chinese believed that literature, being the medium to reach people's minds and hearts, occupied a tremendously important place in the cultivation and regulation of human morals and aesthetic practices. However, examining the Chinese classical canon of writing for female images is by no

[44] For a short introduction to this form of classical-language fiction and for further reference, see Nienhauser (1986:356-359).

means a simple task. Consisting of four parts (*sibu* 四部),[45] the canon includes writings called: the classics (*jing* 经), the philosophers (*zi* 子), the histories (*shi* 史) and the collections (*ji* 集) – altogether 3, 471 books assembled during the 1770's into the collection called the *Siku quanshu* 四库全书 [imperial library or complete library in four branches of literature] (Wilkinson, 2013:945). This ever-growing canon of writing was, indeed, the basis of Chinese society in terms of teaching morals and educating the societal elite for thousands of years.

The classics refers to very old texts usually called Five Classics (*Wujing* 五经).[46] These books are collectively known as the Confucian Classics as it was commonly believed that it was Confucius who authored, or edited, them (Guisso, 1981:47). Consisting of the *Book of Documents* (*Shujing* 书经), the *Book of Poetry* (*Shijing* 诗经), the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易经), and the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 礼记), the classics represented, as Michel Hockx puts it, "a collection of documentary, lyrical, spiritual and ritual writings that were long hailed as the absolute standards of good writing and proper morals" (Hockx, 2003:xiii) and furthermore were the core of classical education for the ruling elite of traditional China until the end of the Song dynasty (960-1279).[47] The second part of the canon – the philosophers – comprises somewhat later texts dating from the first century of the Christian era, representing the explanations of the classics by philosophical writers and thinkers in their attempt to "systematize classics into the distinct schools of thought" (Hockx, 2003:xiii).The histories, the third part of the canon, are the works of history or documented accounts of the reign of each emperor throughout the imperial era and were meant to administer "praise and blame" (Ibid., 2003:xiii).

From this brief overview of the first three parts of the Chinese literary canon, it is obvious that the majority of the texts included in the *Siku quanshu* contain official and philosophical documents and historical records, which suggests vast conceptual differences between ancient Chinese and Western perceptions of literature. Providing a brief but nonetheless quite

[45] This fourfold classification developed from the six fold scheme after the Han dynasty (Wilkinson, 2013:938). Although a subject of many alterations and renamings, the canon I refer to is the standard established in the *Siku Quanshu* of the 18th century.

[46] Sometimes they are called the *Six Classics*, including the lost *Book of Music* (Wilkinson, 2013:369) or at a later point there are *Thirteen Classics* (Ibid., pp. 369-371).

[47] After this period another set of instruction books - the *Sishu* 四书 (*Four Books*) became the basis of the curriculum while the *Five Classics* gradually declined in importance. The *Four Books* consisted of *Daxue* 大学 [*Great Learning*], *Lunyu* 论语 [*Analects*], *Mengzi* 孟子 [*Mencius*], and *Zhongyong* 中庸 [*Doctrine of the Mean*] (Wilkinson, 2013:371).

comprehensive overview of literary concepts and terms as compared between Western and Chinese traditions, Idema and Haft in *A Guide to Chinese Literature* (1997) point out that

> [f]rom the time of Aristotle the Western tradition has accorded a high place, often the very highest, to fiction. Unlike factual history, which remains tied to the incidental or "accidental" feature of real events, fiction was thought to provide better demonstrations of general or "essential" truths. In the Chinese tradition, on the other hand, history has always been regarded as the highest embodiment of truth; fiction has been anathema" (Idema and Haft, 1997:10).

Thus, it is clear that the Chinese views on literature, fiction and history stand in a sharp contrast to how Western tradition acknowledged fictional writing.

Taking into consideration the early Chinese dismissive attitude towards fiction, it might seem peculiar that the last category of the canon, called the collections, was given space within *Siku quanshu* at all. At first glance, the texts belonging to this part of the canon could be perceived as coming closest to the modern Western understanding of literary writing as creative lyrics and prose. However, although the *collections* include texts belonging to imaginative literature such as poetic and prose writing of individual authors (*bieji* 别集) or literary anthologies (*zongji* 总集), they also contained "factual works, such as memorials to the throne or biographies" (Wilkinson, 2013:939).This suggests that poetic and prose writings, perhaps, were not considered fictional, but rather factual, conveyed through the developed standards of formal beauty and aesthetics.

Indeed, modern scholars of the history of Chinese literature argue that poetry and prose were the individual author's attempt at interpretation of classical writings expressed through art.[48] This means that literature did not and could not justify itself through art alone, but related closely to historical truth and, additionally, was supposed to teach its reader a moral lesson. The tendency to search for verifiable truth in literary writing continued to prevail even when the novel as a new genre gained popularity during Ming China (1368–1644). A highly fictional genre as perceived in the West, the novel in China, in C. T. Hsia's words, represented "a different concept of fiction" (Hsia, 1968:16) which manifested itself in the fact that "author and reader alike were more interested in the fact in fiction than in fiction as such" (Ibid., p.16).[49] The discourse which did not allow fiction to enter literary forms of expression has continued to the modern period. As Michel

[48] See Hockx (2003) who observes that Chinese literati in writing poetry and prose looked towards classical writings "for inspiration and guidance" (Hockx and Ivo, 2003:xiii-xiv) simultaneously developing "their own standards of formal beauty and aesthetic expression" (Ibid., p. xiv).

[49] Hsia insists (p. 6) that Western literary critics still judge the traditional Chinese "novel" against its modern Western counterpart.

Hockx argues, "Until the present day, the vast majority of educated Chinese readers consider any kind of reading of literary text that does *not* take into account the personality of the author and the socio-political context to be utterly fallacious"(Hockx, 2003:xiv).

Since ancient times a sharp distinction thus was made between what might be called "serious literature" and "trivial literature." Prose and poetry that were labeled as serious literature were based on the Classics' principles of morality and ethics and therefore considered as highly factual having nothing to do with fiction. Random notes, such as (*biji* 笔记) and, later, popular literature in forms of ghost stories and stories of the strange were typically described as "non-literary or informal writings" (Wilkinson, 2013:939) and would normally be denied space within the fourfold framework of the Chinese canon. Everything too fictional, too untrue, because the events depicted never really happened, or the feelings they convey were not really felt, was perceived as misleading and morally corrupted. Hence, all forms of fiction have traditionally been excluded from the realm of literature as these writings could not contribute positively to the study of the Way and therefore, per definition had nothing to do with "real" literature (Idema and Haft, 1997:56).

Japanese scholar, Kawai Kōsō (川合康三), in his study of Chinese autobiographical literature (*Zhongguo de zizhuan wenxue* 中国的自传文学 [Autobiographical literature in China]) (1998) expresses a similar view when he argues that we can basically distinguish two kinds of literature – the literati authored literature and popular literature (Kōsō, 1999:7) [50], both of which enjoy quite different status and prestige. According to him, although there is no denial that there was a place for popular literature (俗文学) (Ibid., p.7) in classical Chinese literature, it does not and cannot replace *the* literature (文学) (Ibid., p.7) whose essence is represented in classical literary works (古典诗文) (Ibid., p.7). The major difference between the two is whether these literary works are based on fictive characters (虚构的人物) (Ibid., p.7) and fictive events (虚构的事件) (Ibid., p.7) or on real life events (现实状况) (Ibid., p.7) transcribed into poetry and essays (诗文) (Ibid., p.7) by the literati class (士大夫阶层) (Ibid., p.7). Hence, as Kawai Kōsō argues, the existence of these two kinds of reading reflects the division between popular reading and official reading and points to the

[50] Although Kawai Kōsō distinguishes between high literature and popular literature, the very curious thing is that even the popular literature must had been authored by the men of letters albeit anonymously. Writing even such "trivial" non-literary texts required education and talent which only the elite class had access to but the author's name had to be kept secret in order not to ruin his reputation.

inferiority of fictional prose that prevailed in China since the early imperial age in spite of its obvious popularity with the readers (Ibid., p.7).[51]

The inferiority of fiction is also given much attention by Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu in his study *From Historicity to Fictionality: The Chinese Poetics of Narrative* (1994), where he traces the secondary status of fiction as compared to history writing. Addressing the issue of a complicated relationship between history and fiction in the Chinese narrative tradition, Lu demonstrates that the Chinese narrative tradition basically emphasized historical authenticity and factual accuracy over fictive fabrication and creativity. He argues that even the term that the Chinese traditionally used for fiction (*xiaoshuo* 小说), translated as "small talk" or "minor discourse," (Lu, 1994:39) illustrates the low regard for this term especially seen in comparison with historiography (Ibid., p. 39). It is therefore also possible to argue that the images in canonical texts were more significant for women's lives since they were not mere fiction.

Consequently, having these discrepancies in mind, I argue that if I were to restrict my search for female images in Chinese tradition to fiction alone, as Pearson and Pope have done in their volume, my choice of method would be highly problematic. Not only would my findings be incomplete, but, perhaps, even misleading, as they would not reflect the images of women in the canon of Chinese classical writing which, as it now has been established, occupied a far more superior position than fiction until the beginning of the twentieth century. Thus looking for female portrayals in the classical writings first will facilitate the determination of the images that were considered most essential for the definition of women's roles and, additionally, give an opportunity to trace how these images evolved historically. This is not to say, however, that the female images as portrayed through fiction will be neglected. On the contrary, they will function as an important supplement to the rigid canonical roles of older texts.

[51] Some of the earliest representations of inventive literature are a collection of ghosts stories, *Tales of Wonder* (*Lieyi zhuan* 列异传) which belongs to the late Han dynasty and is attributed to the first emperor of the state of Cao Wei in the Three Kingdoms period, Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226 CE), and another collection compiled roughly around the Jin dynasty (265-420), *In Search of the Supernatural* (*Soushenji* 搜神记), authored by a court historian Gan Bao 干宝 (d. 336). These two collections of supernatural stories are often seen as prototypes of fictional writing in China, see Kan (1996).

4.2. Which Texts to Explore

Given the obvious impossibility of attending to all the texts belonging to the four categories of the Chinese canon, I have chosen to limit my search to a few representative texts from the following three groups: a few classical texts from the Confucian canon; biographies of women and didactic materials for women, and fiction.

The reason I divide these texts into three groups has to do with the three more or less distinct audiences for whom they were intended. The texts from the first two groups are didactic materials containing formal moral instructions intended exclusively for men (as in classics) and for women (as in biographies and lessons for women), while the purpose of the last group of texts is to provide potentially both genders with entertaining and "immoral" but nevertheless didactic and instructive lessons (as in fiction). When I name women as potential readers of fiction, I have to take into consideration that even this kind of low literature was written by the male literati and primarily for the literati. To look for female portrayals in the texts from these three groups is to find the core of Chinese female images which then can be tested against the typology of female images established by Pearson and Pope.

The Confucian canon will be represented by a few texts taken from the Five Classics, such as *The Book of Poetry*, *The Book of Changes*, *The Book of Documents*, and *The Book of Rites*. The second group, biographies of women and didactic materials for women, will be studied through Liu Xiang's 刘向 (77-6 BC) *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*Lienüzhuan* 列女传) and Ban Zhao's *Lessons for Women*. Finally, Chinese fiction will be viewed through the "strange stories" as exemplified in Gan Bao's *In Search of the Supernatural*, Pu Songling's 蒲松龄(1640-1715) *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (*Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊斋志异), and through a brief survey of the so-called Four Great Classical Novels (*Sida Mingzhu* 四大名著), in other words and in chronological order *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi* 三国演义 (1522)), *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水浒传 (1589)), *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西游记 (1592)) and *Dream of the Red Chamber* (1792).

Although recent scholarship provides histories and translated anthologies of Chinese literature in abundance,[52] only one of them deals exclusively with the representations of women in

[52] See, for example, Birch (1989); Owen (1996); Minford and Lau (2002); Chang and Owen (2010); Mair (2010).

ancient Chinese texts. This anthology, *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture* (2003), edited by Robin R. Wang, contains a range of texts which belong to the realms of history, philosophy, religion and literature and which were brought together in this volume to convey women's basic identities since antiquity. Containing translations of texts which are available in English for the first time, this volume offers insights into such issues as "Chinese perspectives on women and gender, cosmology and human nature, as well as women's social roles and virtue" (Wang R., 2003:ix) laying down a solid scholarly basis for further research. This anthology will serve as the basis for my exploration of female images in Chinese high literature, i.e. works belonging to the first two groups mentioned above. Although many of the conclusions drawn from these findings by Robin Wang in her introduction to this anthology anticipate my findings to some degree, my discussion and analysis of Chinese female images encompasses a wider temporal and generic space.

4.3. Female Images in Classical Texts

As already established above, the point of departure for my search for the female images is the Five Classics as there is a tradition among Chinese to consider classical writings as 'the source of all literary forms' as Fuehrer says citing a literary critic Liu Xie (c.465 c.520) (Fuehrer, 2003:117). Designed for the education of a male elite, these texts on morals, government, law and cosmology, although first and foremost defining the ideal personal qualities of the 'superior man' (*junzi* 君子), as Richard W. Guisso calls the Chinese gentleman (Guisso, 1981:48), also provided information about ideal social roles for a woman. Some would argue that these female ideals do not represent women from all social strata of Chinese society and only can apply to a very small group of the Chinese elite, because full literacy among women in early China was exceptional (Hinsch, 2010:3). However, it is not my intention to trace the discrepancies between the roles that were prescribed and roles that were practiced in real life. My search for female images is limited to literary writing. The Five Classics cannot, of course, do justice to the wide range of social roles occupied by women in ancient Chinese society and do not provide the definitive portrayals of gender relations. The images they contain are the "literary" images of ideal womanhood as defined by the powerful male elites and therefore perceived as mandatory for imitation.

Much of previous scholarship focuses on the subordinate roles of women as prescribed by the ancient texts.[53] I would like to turn away from this line of argument for a while and concentrate rather on the availability and types of female images. Scholars generally agree that the Confucian classics had very little to say of women.[54] Indeed, as education was reserved for the male half of early society, which was to perform multiple public activities in governing society, the Classics' portrayal of women, for whom the public realm was closed, reveals a different set of values ascribed to the female. Guisso argues that, although the Classics do not engage in the process of defining the ideal female characteristics, they do idealize female "life-cycle roles of daughter, wife and mother" (Guisso, 1981:48). Portrayals of women occupying these roles undeniably play the major role in the classics. But if one is to look closer, one might become aware of yet some other images.

Robin Wang demonstrates with the example of a few carefully chosen odes from *The Book of Poetry* that the odes, besides testifying to "the fundamental importance of marriage and family in society" (Wang R., 2003:5), and therefore portraying women as wives to their husbands, allow some space for other images as well. Several odes, she claims, "without inhibition celebrate the joys of sex outside marriage" (Ibid., p.5), providing a female image corresponding to Pearson and Pope's "mistress." Some other odes, as Wang continues, "celebrate passionate love between the sexes in the context of courtship and marriage" (Ibid., p.5) supporting the images of Pearson and Pope's young "virgin" who is about to get married and become a "helpmate." Whether women are portrayed as mistresses, maidens or wives, they are "praised for their beauty and intelligence" (Ibid., p.5), while maidens and wives get credit for their virtues as well. Besides these images, Wang catches a glimpse of a concubine, and a widow. One of the essential points Wang makes in her assessment of the odes is that, although they seem generally to "offer moral exhortations to men, specifically to shame them for not living up to society's expectations of their relationships with women," at the same time they also "generally confirm a basic cultural commitment to the underlying complementarity of male and female gender roles, and the cultivation of emotions appropriate to that complementarity" (Ibid., p.5).

In an introduction to yet another book of classics, *The Book of Changes*, Wen and Trowbridge offer an interpretation of *yin* 阴 and *yang* 阳 images, a cosmology widely researched

[53] See Guisso (1981), Sung (1981); O'Hara and Liu (1981).
[54] See, Guisso (1981), Sung (1981).

and assessed by many scholars.[55] Being much more than a book of divination, *The Book of Changes* shows how all things and processes in the world are basically products of the relationship between the two complementary patterns, representing *yin* (female, soft, weak, dark, etc.) and *yang* (male, hard, strong, light, etc.). The hexagrams,[56] which Wen and Trowbridge found suitable for highlighting traditional female images, reveal the significance the Chinese attached to "gender and its influence on shaping traditional Chinese moral and social expectations" (Wen and Trowbridge, 2003:27). They add to the already established images of wives who act properly and in accordance with their roles (while husbands act in ways proper for a husband). In spite of Wen and Trowbridge's claim that each of the hexagrams they selected for translation and interpretation provides "an image of the significance of *yin* from different perspectives" (Ibid., p.27), the only female image they discuss is *yin* within the family, which brings us back to the roles of mothers, wives and daughters. One of the most important points to keep in mind, however, is the interconnectedness of *yin* and *yang* as "these two symbols reflect Chinese understanding of the world as a complementarity of movement processes and events (…), which can be characterized as dominated by *yin* or *yang* at any given moment" (Ibid., p.25). This means that the negative connotations which *yin* is often connected with (soft, weak, dark) are only negative because they acquired such unfavorable linkages through the male portrayals of it as such.[57] Hence, female roles connected to *yin* (mothers, wives and daughters) are not necessarily submissive, passive and obedient. Ideally, according to the *Book of Changes*, and depending on the situation, they could be viewed either as dominant or submissive, just as *yang* and the qualities it was associated with could either dominate or submit to *yin*. The idea of equal importance and the changeability of the subordinate and dominant patterns between *yin* and *yang* invites an assumption that female images can and do acquire certain strong characteristics depending on the situation and without contradicting their feminine nature. This corresponds with Pearson and Pope's similar assumption that the secondary and submissive heroine roles can acquire active and authoritative hero characteristics (Pearson and Pope, 1976:9-10).

The next text, the *Book of Documents*, provides very few female images. As Paul R. Goldin remarks, this text is essentially a collection of writings made up of "speeches attributed to some of

[55] See Raphals (1998); Furth (1999); Hinsch (2010).
[56] A hexagram is a combination of graphic images of broken and unbroken lines followed by the corresponding philosophical text. For a definitive introduction to the *Book of Changes*, see Nielsen (2003).
[57] See Hinsch (2010:162-7) who discusses how the perception of yin and yang changed historically and culturally acquiring the connotations that suited male elite.

the most famous men in the earliest epochs of China's long history" (Goldin, 2003:46). The excerpt from the *Book of Documents* which Goldin chose to comment on for Wang's anthology provides us with an image of a wife to the King of Shang. The focus of this portrayal is on the dangers that a woman can bring about to a man if not kept in her due place. Although, again, we meet a portrayal of a woman as a wife, she is not praised for her virtues, intelligence or beauty as was the case in the *Book of Poetry*. On the contrary, through the story of the King's defeat on the battle field, other men are warned to be cautious in letting women gain too much power and meddle in state affairs. The above example illustrates how *yin* is capable of exercising power over *yang*, although such domination is typically portrayed as dangerous and destructive to the male order of things.

As Li Yu-ning in her introduction to *Images of Women in Chinese Literature* (1994) notes, "[i]n China, the destructive woman is a familiar figure in myth and legend; many of the best known women in Chinese history have been portrayed almost exclusively in negative terms"(Li Yu-ning, 1994:2). She supports her argument with the examples of the three beauties, depicted through legends and tales as responsible for the fall of the early dynasties and the three empresses of the Han, Tang and Qing dynasties who were blamed for the decline of each of them. These examples offer an insight into how literary writing could be used to give a negative flavor to the very strong and powerful roles that women undoubtedly were able to play in society.

In order to ensure the correct demeanor for men and, not least, for women, yet another classic was compiled. The *Book of Rites* is believed to contain the earliest code of behavior for women, which, as Robin Wang observes, became known as the three obediences and four virtues (*sancong side* 三从四德) (Wang, 2003f:48). The three obediences implied female submission to her father as a daughter, to her husband as his wife, and to her son as his mother. Also the four virtues were meant to encourage a daughter's, wife's and mother's excellence in women's virtue (*fude* 妇德), women's speech (*fuyan* 妇言), women's appearance (*furong* 妇容), and women's work (*fugong* 妇功). These four virtues remained at the center of teachings for women in later centuries (Ibid., p.49). Again, as in the previously discussed classics, it can be seen that the roles that are bestowed upon women in this text unfold themselves within the family unit. Although the roles of daughter, wife and mother are central, a great number of other female images, such as concubine, sister, sister-in-law, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, are given attention as well. In this way, the *Book of Rites* gave prescriptions to all imaginable female roles as long as they occupied their rightful place within a family unit.

As stated earlier, the classics were presumably written, assembled and edited by men with the male reading audience in mind. The earliest female roles that were foregrounded in Chinese classical writings were daughter, wife, and mother, whose archetypes of behavior were submissiveness, obedience and virtue. There is no doubt that there existed a much greater diversity of female images in early Chinese society,[58] but picturing women as family members in the classical instructional texts and idealizing only certain female qualities, could well be a reaction on the male side to protect themselves against the power that women undeniably have over men. Male desire of female beauty and fear of female sexuality were perceived as destructive for their spiritual progression and resulted in the contradictory portrayal of women in early Chinese writing – they are either praised for their virtue, beauty and sagacious intellect (if these qualities benefit men close to them), or they are denounced for bringing misfortune upon men and whole kingdoms (because of the disastrous effect their tempting beauty and cunning intellect have on men).

Scholars who have contributed with insightful work on this issue include Tsung Su, Lisa Raphals and others. Tsung Su traces the trend of portraying women through the positive and negative image from ancient Chinese literature to modern times (1930s), the earliest examples being the two mythological goddesses: the Life-Giving Goddess Mother, Nü Wa and the female Destroyer-Deceiver, goddess Ba, a daughter of the Yellow Emperor (Tsung, 1994:27-8). In Raphals' terms, the two types of women who were typically presented through the inner court stories and intellectual virtue stories were "givers of sage counsel" or "catalysts of chaos" (Raphals, 1998:6). Standing closest to a ruler, these women occupying the roles of his mother, his wife or his concubines were "the major agents of intellectual and moral influence" (Raphals, 1998:6), positions from which they could exert unlimited influence either positive or negative causing their countries to flourish or perish. This comment can be linked with Pearson and Pope's role of "The Sage" which they define as a hero role. Indeed, the intellectual influence that females exercised over men – a potentially heroic action - was disguised by their position as wives or mothers if we were to speak in Pearson and Pope's terms. However, this female power certainly exemplifies the co-existence of female and male characteristics in female images.

Thus classical writings (as in Five Classics) can be seen as performing a function of moral instruction for men, teaching them to be aware of the advantages and drawbacks of female influence

[58] Besides the traditional images of Chinese wives, daughters and concubines, Hinsch mentions female scholars, poets and musicians (Hinsch, 2010:121-8).

and offering them a set of conventions to keep women at bay. In the next section I will look at what images become available to women when such moral writing changes its audience and is written about women, for women and by women.

4.4. Female Images in Didactic Texts for Women

Of all the many works that existed for the moral instruction of girls and women, Liu Xiang's *Biographies of Exemplary Women*,[59] arguably the first book devoted solely to the subject of women, will be the first to come under scrutiny. A government official and a scholar, Liu Xiang intended this book not only for a female audience but as a warning to the emperor against women lacking in virtue (Kinney, 1995:51 note 59). The *Biographies* present both positive and negative images of women during different stages of their lives (daughter, wife and mother) portrayed in accordance with the best traditions of the classical texts, perhaps, due to the fact that many biographies for this volume were taken from the *Classics.*[60] Consisting of 125 biographies of women of virtue and women of malice, the *Biographies* contribute to the notoriously male mode of perceiving a woman either as *a femme fatale* capable of destroying male righteousness and his kingdom or as a sage capable of providing a ruler with wise insights. Wang's anthology provides a few translated biographies among which there is an image of Mengzi's mother who as a sage. Acting in accordance with her duties in the family and knowing her rightful place as a woman, she through her role as a mother teaches her son proper conduct and the value of education.[61] Another biography tells about a sagacious daughter Tirong who wrote a letter to the emperor asking him to give her father a chance for redemption for a crime, by this action making the emperor realize that the mere assigning of corporal punishment to the criminal does not make him a good ruler (Wang R., 2003:155-7). Yet another image provided through biography is the favorite concubine of King You of Zhou, a beauty called Baosi, who became responsible for the fall of the state of Zhou due to the King's infatuation with her (Ibid., pp. 159-161). These few examples reflect the polarity of the

[59] On the question of Liu Xiang's authorship, see Hinsch (2007).

[60] Pauline C. Lee points to the *Zuo Commentary* (*Zuozhuan* 左传) and the *Discourses of the State* (*Guoyü* 国语) as the texts Liu Xiang borrowed heavily from (Lee, 2003:149).

[61] Mengzi's mother 孟之母 is a well-known phrase which appears in earliest textbooks and is traditionally used to describe an example of excellent virtue. Stories about Mengzi's mother were a part of a child's early moral education and can also be found in such children primers as *Three-Character Classic* (*Sanzi jing* 三字经) and *A Thousand Character Classic* (*Qianziwen* 千字文) (Wilkinson, 2013:295).

presented female images in *Biographies of Exemplary Women* as sagacious or ill-advised, virtuous or vicious, life-giving or destructive. Yet it nevertheless shows the diversity of female images and, as Li Yu-ning insightfully notes, male expressions of criticism and admiration of certain female images "are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and they can coexist in society and literature" (Li Yu-ning, 1994:9).

Now we turn to the female images that become available when a woman author is responsible for portraying them. The earliest influential text of this kind is attributed to the female court historian Ban Zhao and her *Lessons for Women*. Robin Wang along with some other scholars observes that Ban Zhao's view of women does not differ greatly from that of the male sages and scholars.[62] Just as in the classics and the *Biographies*, the female ideals that she advocated in *Lessons for Women* are virtuous women who know their place in the family and practice humility, obedience and are good wives for their husbands. However, as Wang rightfully observes, Ban Zhao, in spite of her obvious conservatism,[63] did break new ground in her *Lessons* when she spoke for female education:

> She [Ban Zhao] argues that an education in the Chinese Classics is necessary so that both women and men can fulfill their familial roles more effectively. Just as the husband will never be able to guide his wife and family if he remains ignorant about the teachings of the Chinese Classics, so, too, a wife will never be able to serve her husband and family if she is kept from being instructed in the same texts (Wang, 2003f:178).

According to her own introduction to the *Lessons*, Ban Zhao intended her book for her daughters (Idema and Grant, 2004:33), but one cannot help thinking that she might have another audience in mind when she suggested the necessity of female education – those who actually had it in their power to let women/girls get education. Using her status and position as court historian, Ban Zhao might have talked to the male elite in the language that they could understand and relate to – the language of classical writings. In almost each point that she makes in the seven short chapters of the *Lessons*, Ban Zhao supports her ideas by citing the appropriate excerpts from the *Classics*. In this way, by advocating conservative views on female behavior and bearing, on the one side, and female literacy, on the other, Ban Zhao demonstrated that, as long as those were practiced side by side, men would only benefit from them. Not only would women get a deeper understanding of the

[62] See, for instance, Lee (1994); Raphals (1998); Li-Hsiang (2006).
[63] Hinsch (2010) and Swann (1932) have different explanations for Ban Zhao's conservatism: from political strategies to ideological movements and even possible Daoist religious convictions, see Hinsch (2010:129), also Swann (1932:82-3).

prescribed conventions of Chinese society and better serve their husbands, parents-in-law and families in general, they would also be able to educate their sons and daughters in the proper rites. In this way, female education might help discover yet another dimension of female virtue.

Another important aspect of Ban Zhao's *Lessons* is that, no matter how conservative her views on the proper female place and behavior might be, I would still argue that Ban Zhao's book differs from the male authored equivalents in a significant way. The images she provides us with are largely positive. Although she does speak of the negative influence a lack of virtue and foolishness can bring upon the family, Ban Zhao speaks only of potential dangers a woman can bring upon herself and the household and gives advice how to escape such fate.

Ban Zhao's *Lessons* are remarkable in a few other ways. Revolutionizing the accepted conventions of portraying women mostly through the roles that they play within the family, she managed to add to the limited number of female images when she introduced an image of herself as a woman scholar. Although she does not speak directly of her position as a court historian, the public records do it for her. Thus in an indirect way she shows how education added a new dimension to her identity as mother, wife and widow, and how women, if they play their cards right, can discover and attend to their talents through education. Clearly, Ban Zhao can be viewed as assuming the role of "Educator," an active hero role that allows her to speak with authority and exert influence on her readers (both female and male). Moreover, when she shares her own doubts about proper behavior when growing up and when bringing up her own children in the introduction to her *Lessons*,[64] Ban Zhao allows for her private life to become public, heralding the beginnings of female autobiographical writing.

4.5. Female Images in Chinese Fiction

Having established the ideal roles that were bestowed on women by the prescriptions of classical writings and didactics of exemplary biographies and admonishing lessons, I turn to the field that offers a greater variety of female images. Fictional and popular literature in China, as already established, occupied a low position if compared to the serious scholarly literature. This could then mean that the female images found in this kind of literature would be regarded as less acceptable and less decent. Nevertheless the images to be discovered in fiction might later bring valuable

[64] See Swann (1932:82-3).

insights into modern autobiographers' choices of images for themselves and the other females in their narratives since fiction, despite its low official position, was undoubtedly read.[65]

Modern scholars such as Knight (2012), and DeWoskin (1996) mark the arrival of fictional literature in China with Gan Bao's fourth century collection of records of the strange in *In Search of the Supernatural*.[66] Gan Bao, himself a court historian, could not have considered his collection of stories as fiction because it was not until the eighth century that a formal distinction between history and fiction was made.[67] Thus even when assembling and editing stories of strange phenomena such as reincarnation, ghosts, spirits, unusual events or fantastical people, Gan Bao followed the patterns of traditional historical writing. And as a historical account demanded factual information about the time, people and places, the records of the strange stated the names of real people and places adding credibility to the narrative. Although the tales from this collection belonged to the *zhiguai* 志怪 genre[68] (translated as "tales of the miraculous" or "records of anomalies"), they still shared a common purpose with official history – to record facts. Moreover, in Gan Bao's own words, the purpose of this collection was to demonstrate that "the Way of spirits is not false" (cited in Knight, 2012:60), which raised it to the status of some kind of unofficial history. This collection created a space where the unknown could become defined, acquire names and meanings and for evidence that the spirit world was real.

The stories in this collection contain accounts which are fantastic, weird and miraculous, describing encounters with the dead, fox spirits taking human form and the like. There are many stories that feature female figures in all kinds of bizarre situations, among them are old ladies, mothers, wives, daughters, empresses and just ordinary women. Some stories describe female characters as somewhat dangerous women spirits, capable of seducing young men (as in "The Woman in Black with a Black Umbrella," (Kan Pao, 1996:226),[69] while others describe the proper

[65] Idema and Haft (1997:58-9).

[66] On *Soushenji* as a genre, see Nienhauser (1986:716-8). For a study of the text, see DeWoskin (1974). For a translation of, see DeWoskin (1996).

[67] The distinction was made by a court historian Liu Zhiji 刘知几(661-721) when he in his *Generalities on History* (*Shitong* 史通) marked the difference between serious and respectable history and "witty yet petty talk" (Knight, 2012:53).

[68] For scholarly studies of this genre, see DeWoskin (1974), Kao (1985), Chiang (2005).

[69]Since the Chinese text of *In Search of the Supernatural* is a collection of stories merely divided into chapters without clear-cut titles for the stories collected in it, and since DeWoskin and Crump Jr. do not comment on this fact in the introduction to their translation, I assume that suitable headings were made up by the translators for readers' convenience.

behavior for wives-to-be (as in "Wen-ho Meets the Shade of His Wife-to-be," (Ibid., pp. 172-3). It is not possible here to review all of these stories, however, one of them stands out and can serve as a good example of what Chinese literati thought would happen if a woman assumed a male role. In "A Woman Is Transformed into a Man" (Ibid., pp.66-7), a situation is described where a woman became a male, took a wife and fathered children. As a comment on this, the narrative states: "When a man becomes a woman, punishment by castration has been excessive. When a woman becomes a man, women are governing"(Ibid., pp.66-67). This story and commentary to it could be viewed metaphorically to reflect male fear of what great power a woman could attain if she started acting as a man (taking on a heroic role). The tension between female and male qualities and the moral obligations the two genders have towards each other go through many of these stories. Women are shown as longing for their husbands when they are forced to be apart; such qualities as female patience and devotion, fidelity and loyalty are foregrounded (as for instance in "Han Ping and His Wife" (Knight, 2012:61).

These stories, in spite of being regarded as the beginnings of Chinese fiction, were not consciously created as fiction. This cannot be said about the Tang tales, or "tales of the marvelous" (*chuanqi* 传奇). As Knight notes, "despite fictional elements in the earlier records of the strange, scholars have generally followed Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551-1602)[70] in seeing the longer "tales of the marvelous" 传奇 (literally "transmitting wonders") as China's first deliberately created fiction" (Knight, 2012:64-5). Just like the stories from Gan Bao's collection, Tang tales were written by literati and for literati, which meant using classical language and highlighting the ethical standards this social class adhered to. This can been seen in the foregrounding of the privileges enjoyed by the learned men who had had success in civil examinations, but also by the emphasis on the moral codes that defined Chinese society during the Tang dynasty (618-907). However, these tales "focus more on private life, and often explicitly identify the author and his motives for recording the tale" (Knight, 2012:65) thus reflecting a fundamental interest in human character.

As for the female portrayals in the tales, a greater diversity of roles (sometimes even heroic!) seems be tolerated in fictional narratives. This is, perhaps, because they are situated beyond reality and therefore offer a freer space for different roles. Some of the stories allow women characters to disguise themselves as men or attain great physical skills of combat. This tendency can be seen in

[70] Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 was a Chinese scholar, writer and bibliophile during the late Ming (1368-1644) dynasty. On his life and work, see Nienhauser (1986:439-441).

Li Gongzuo's 李公佐 (770-850)[71] "The Tale of Xie Xiao'e" 谢小娥传, where, as Sabina Knight notes, a woman has to disguise herself as a manservant collecting evidence in order to avenge the murders of her father and husband (Knight, 2013:68). Another similar example is one of the earliest tales of swordspeople "The Tale of Nie Yinniang" 聂隐娘传 dating from the late ninth century and authored by Pei Xing 裴鉶[72] (825-880). It describes a maiden who was trained to become a skilled assassin with a dagger (Knight, 2013:69). According to Pearson and Pope's classification, these female characters would receive the status of "The Warrior," which in itself is a great achievement.

These obviously heroic manifestations of female roles, although very few, confirm a greater variability that was allowed in fictional literary products as opposed to the traditional canonical writing. Also visual images of Tang women often manifest the peculiar phenomenon of masculinized appearance. As Jowen Tung demonstrates in his study *Fable for the Patriarchs: Gender Politics in Tang Discourse* (2000):

> The immediate visual images we have of Tang women are their plump figures dressed in audacious, low-cut outfits or in man's wear of foreign styles, agile palace women riding on horseback or playing polo, lethargic court entertainers playing foreign instruments, or miniature figurines of charming entertainers. Most of the women we see in the extant Tang art works and funeral figurines seem self-content in their leisure and confident in their actions (Tung, 2000:19).

The cross-dressing women described in Tang tales by male literati are not the only examples of women acquiring male qualities in literature. Tung demonstrates that a similar tendency can be observed in women's own writing as well. Calling it cross-dressed writing, he demonstrates how the talented courtesans of this period endorsed their poetry with masculine qualities juggling with masculine images and language (Tung, 2000:204-5). The Tang period with its "entrenchment of civil service examinations," "state-sanctioned Taoisim," and its "craze for Buddhism" (Tung, 2000:9) enabled a particular vision of women by men and by women themselves.[73] The images that became available during this period do reflect the Tang's "liberated female energies" (Ibid., p. 9). Among these images are "shrewd wives, cunning witches, spoiled princesses, versatile courtesans, and wayward Taoist priestesses" (Ibid., pp. 9-10). Hence in Tang literature, the more relaxed view of what roles female characters could play could also reflect a common acknowledgement that such fictitious narratives were intended for mere entertainment and could not serve as serious role

[71] Li Gongzuo's 李公佐 (770-850) was one of the principal writers in *chuanqi* genre during Tang dynasty. On biographical information, see Nienhauser (1986:541-3).

[72] Pei Xing 裴鉶 (825-880) was the first to use the term chuanqi "as a title for a collection of his short fiction. It came into use as a generic term during the Sung dynasty" (Nienhauser, 1986:356).

[73] For Buddhism's influence on Chinese vernacular literature during the Tang, see Hanan (1981:6).

models. However, as Sabina Knight observes, although later classical tales developed the female portrayals with warrior characteristics, they often remain very feminine. This trend can be observed in the mid-sixteenth century anthology *Tales of Chivalrous Swordspeople* (*Jianxia chuan* 剑侠传) where the heroines retain their feminine qualities compared to the "cross-dressing Xie Xiao'e or the masculinized swordswoman Yinniang" (Knight, 2013:69).

In another, and later collection of classical tales - Pu Songling's *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* (1766),[74] heroic roles for female characters, such as those that could be observed in earlier anthologies, are virtually absent. This collection contains multiple examples of female ghosts and fox spirits who drain their lovers' life essence, exhaust them sexually and even make them mortally sick. The same ghosts and fox spirits are also portrayed as devoted lovers and wives, whose wise advice and supernatural powers enable their men to achieve high positions in Chinese society. Fox spirits are thus either dangerous and destructive or wise and helpful but, whatever their nature, their looks are always enchanting and seducing. Fox spirits are extraordinarily beautiful women who tempt males with their charming appearance. If female characters are not portrayed as supernatural temptresses, they are allotted the well-known roles of wives and concubines, mothers/mothers-in-law and daughters who interact with males according to the accepted (or sometimes unaccepted) norms. Thus adulterous wives are punished (as in "Adultery and Enlightenment" (Pu, 2006:383), virtuous wives and concubines are celebrated (as in "The Girl from Nanking" (Ibid., p. 277), mothers are praised for their wisdom and care for their children's well-being and daughters - for being filial (as in "The Laughing Girl" (Ibid., p. 152). In spite of the supernatural touch of these tales which allowed for female characters to become lovers, or "Mistresses" in Pearson and Pope's terminology, it is clear that the main idea in these tales was to reinforce Confucian values, and with that the traditional roles for women.

The assessment of Chinese female literary images would be incomplete without taking a look at the Four Great Classical Novels,[75] which influenced the development of vernacular literature in China and heralded the new vernacular prose that Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879-1942) would promote in the beginning of the 20th century.[76] These literary works contain a large number

[74] For a study of Pu Songling's tales, see Zeitlin (1997).
[75] According to Plaks, these novels began to be defined as "classical novels" first quite recently. He notes that this term is a "neologism of twentieth century scholarship" which seems to have come into common use under the influence of C.T. Hsia's *Classic Chinese Novel* (1968) (Plaks, 1987:4).
[76] On Hu Shi's and Chen Duxiu's role in the literary reform, see Dolezelova-Velingerova (1977).

of female characters. A detailed description of female characters' personal qualities in some of these novels can be found in Yoko Miyamoto's *Demystifying Confucianism* (2011) where Miyamoto explains Confucianism through classic novels. In the following I use this study for a brief overview of the female images in the Chinese classical novels.

The Romance of the Three Kingdoms, although focusing on the disintegration of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.) into the three warring kingdoms and centering upon brotherly bonds, nevertheless features a large quantity of remarkable women. Among them are the great beauty Diao Chan 貂蝉 (who is one of the famous Chinese Four Great Beauties (*Si da mei nü* 四大美女)[77] who sacrificed herself and became the concubine of a tyrant general), the warrior princess Lady Sun 孙夫人 (a great admirer of martial arts and a practitioner since childhood) and a few other women who either excelled in intelligence and wisdom or sacrificed their lives to save their children. Since many of the female characters in this novel are not given personal names, they are mostly spoken of as wives, mothers, daughters and so on. This goes hand in hand with the Confucian tradition to allot female characters roles according to their family obligations. However, it seems that, in spite of the traditional roles, female characters could empower themselves through action. Placed alongside Pearson and Pope's typology, the above-mentioned female characters not only played the roles of virgin, mistress and helpmate (or in other words, a wife), but also presented themselves as an artist (Diao Chan was an excellent musician and entertainer), a warrior (Lady Sun not only decorated her room with weapons and made her servants wear them, but devised a cunning plan to save her husband from captivity (Chapter 54-55)). Another female character, a wife of the advisor Kunming, in spite of a very unattractive appearance is portrayed as excelling in a great number of disciplines and exhibiting a great deal of wisdom. Clearly, this woman can be viewed in Pearson and Pope's heroic category of "The Sage," since her intelligence allowed her to make a name for herself as a chief advisor to a powerful warlord (*The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* Chapter 117) (Miyamoto, 2011:Chapter 9).[78]

Another famous masterpiece from the Ming dynasty, *Water Margin* is most often labeled as a novel where female characters get the worst treatment. Portraying Chinese bandits who call each other *haohan* 好汉, which literally means "good guys" and is often translated as "heroes,"

[77] For more on the Chinese Four Great Beauties, see Perkins (1999:168).

[78] As the website where Miyamoto's study can be found does not provide any page number, I refer to the chapter numbers. Here, Miyamoto (2011: Chapter 9).

(Miyamoto, 2011: Chapter 10) this novel mostly foreshadows the feeling of loyalty these men have towards each other, their keen sense of justice and a strong will to right wrongs. Women as a sex are described as untrustworthy and causing men only trouble. The suppression of romantic love, and together with it, sexual abstinence, are therefore viewed as a sign of a real man. As a consequence, real *haohan* show little interest in women. It is no surprise, therefore, that the great majority of the female characters are portrayed as bad wives and concubines who commit adultery. These women are weak and unable to control their lust – the qualities men hate them for. However, in spite of the majority of negative female characters, it is worth noting that even such a story that places women in an unfavorable light has a few positive examples. Three of the 108 bandits described in this novel are bandit ladies called *nüjie* 女杰 , the female version of *haohan*. They are portrayed as skillful in martial arts, courageous and strong (Miyamoto, 2011: Chapter 11). Naturally, they are not the positive role models for females, as they are just as ruthless and murderous as the male bandits. Nevertheless, the presence of such female characters in this novel, although they are masculinized to a high degree, shows recognition of women in the role of a warrior.

Journey to the West (1592) is perhaps the most retold of the four classical Chinese novels. Although describing the travels of four male protagonists, female characters abound in this story as well. Here women are also troublemakers who subject the novel's heroes to multiple trials. Often they appear as evil spirits, temptresses and monsters. In Bohannan's view, there is a clear distinction between female deities and mortal women in *Journey to the West*. While deities are perfect and flawless, the mortal mother and her three daughters that the heroes meet on their way are "weak, lustful and eager for marriage" (Bohannan, 2012:4). One of the most well-known evil spirits, The White Bone Demon (*Bai gu jing* 白骨精) that appears in this novel is another example of the supernatural creature that can use human appearance to deliberately do harm to the heroes of the story. Like female deities it is also able to change its physical form into a mortal one: "it transforms into an innocent young maiden, the maiden's mother, and the maiden's father" (Weinstock, 2014:520) in its attempts to deceive the main characters.[79] In this novel female characters are represented by traditional images of maiden, daughters and mothers. Their main objective is to trick and deceive the male heroes and it reflects male apprehension of how damaging women's power over men can be.

[79] The White Bone Demon became a derogatory term used to label Jiang Qing 江青 (1914-1991), Mao Zedong's 毛泽东 (1893-1976) wife who attempted to gain control over the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). For details, see Wagner (1990:212).

The Chinese classical novel as a genre reached its apogee with *Dream of the Red Chamber* (1792), which is rated among the top five all-time bestselling novels (Knight, 2013:93).[80] This novel presents a very detailed description of the life of the Jia family members. One of its most remarkable features is that, among the large number of characters in this novel (over four hundred), most of them are female. Among them are beautiful, virtuous and talented maidens (for example Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 (*Honglou meng renmin cidian* (n.d.), p. 8) and Xue Baochai 薛宝钗 (Ibid., p16)), mistresses and concubines (Wang Xifeng 王熙凤 (Ibid., p.4) who seduces young male members of the household for her own entertainment and Jia Yuanchun 贾元春 (Ibid., p.2) who is selected as a concubine for the Emperor), chaste widows (Shi Xiangyun 史湘云 (Ibid., p.5) who after her husband's death never remarries and devotes her time to her son), mothers and grandmothers, daughters, sisters and sisters-in-law, maids who also serve as concubines to their masters. However, the novel does not undermine female intelligence and talent, for many of the main characters are quite distinguished artists. Thus Lin Daiyu is described as an extremely capable poet, writer and musician; Xue Baochai, although hesitant in showing her knowledge, seems to be rather learned about everything; Shi Xianyun is extremely learned and a talented poet as well; Jia Yuanchun, impresses the Emperor with her virtue and learning which enables her to become an Imperial Consort; Jia Xichun 贾惜春 (Ibid., p.14) is a gifted painter, who later becomes a Buddhist nun. These examples demonstrate that, although female roles to a large degree are constricted to the functions they play within a household, there is a certain flexibility to how elite women could express their talents and intellect. There is no doubt that female characters from *Dream of the Red Chamber* have been role models for many of the modern women autobiographers. It was especially their role as "Artists" that must have been most inspiring, as many of the autobiographers in question realized their potential through artistic means of expression by becoming writers, poets and painters.

[80] Initiated by Hu Shi, the studies of this novel became known as Redology (*Hongxue* 红学). For an historical overview of this field of study and a critical analysis of Chinese prescriptions of gender in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, see Edwards (1994).

4.6. Women Writers' own Self-representations

Having looked at a variety of Chinese fictional stories and their female characters, I found a wide array of male visions of heroines whose images manifest themselves in femme fatale, superhuman maiden, ghost wife, courtesan, faithful wife and so on. This is when the storyteller is a man. However, there is evidence that already since early and medieval periods (second century B.C.E. to the tenth century C.E.), a small group of Chinese gentry women were literate and productive.[81] Recent accessibility of rare and previously closed archives made possible the discovery of a larger body of female writing from the Ming to Qing dynasties.[82]

Scholars that had studied Chinese early female writing revealed that literary creativity allowed Chinese women to establish literary authority in spite of their confinement to the inner chambers of their homes. Composing poetry and in this way establishing themselves as artists or writers (two roles traditionally occupied by men and therefore viewed as containing male characteristics), Chinese women could thus acquire hero characteristics. Grace Fong's study (2008) of the poetry of female autobiographers, travelers and literary critics (late 16th to early 19th centuries) provides evidence of this and shows that all of them exhibiting an ability to step outside the traditional roles and embrace typically male roles.

Nevertheless, in spite of the evidence that women were active participants in the literary culture, research on female literary writing has shown that their works were not something that became public (Idema and Grant, 2004; Fong, 2008). This is also true for women in the Western part of the world. Pearson and Pope explain that, being born into a patriarchal society, women were seen as mere members of a subculture and their work was not perceived as universal and, as a consequence, not worth publishing and preserving. What the public became acquainted with instead were the male portraits and male definitions of women and their roles (Pearson and Pope, 1976:2).

The phenomenon of female invisibility in Chinese society and especially their invisibility in literary production came to an end at the beginning of the twentieth century when Chinese women became visible in public domains and, as a consequence, received an opportunity to take action in defining themselves. As Pearson and Pope put it, "[w]omen can allow others to define them, or they

[81]On women writers, see Owen (1986), Idema and Grant (2004), on educated courtesans and their literary productions, see Tung (2000).

[82] See Fong (2008) for a very useful bibliography on writing women in early China.

can choose to define themselves" (Pearson and Pope, 1976:2). In China, such female self-definition manifested itself first in the May-Fourth-period (1917-1923)[83] in fiction, autobiographical sketches and essays, and later in self-proclaimed autobiography in the 1930s after women gained access to public education at home and abroad. Influenced by Western ideas about literature, human rights and scientific modernization, Chinese women writers could now cast aside the old archetypal myths about roles women could play in literary creations and in life and create new myths that allowed them to construct positive, struggling and powerful images of themselves in public life. Li Yu-ning's anthology *Chinese Women through Chinese Eyes* (1992), with a whole section is devoted to Chinese modern women's portraits voiced by women themselves, provides examples of images of a factory worker, a village schoolteacher, businesswoman, and a young nurse. All these images belong to women who grew of age under the influence of new ideas of the May Fourth Movement confirming the new tendency among women to take action into their own hands and describe themselves as heroes in their own stories.[84]

5. A Heroine but Also a Hero

From the above analysis it is clear that Pearson and Pope's typology of heroines - "The Virgin", The Mistress" and "The Helpmate," sometimes correspond to, sometimes differ from, and sometimes overlap the roles of daughter, wife and mother which predominate in Chinese literature. Therefore a slight adjustment to the terminology of this typology is required for the present study. Applied to the Chinese context, the heroine roles might include female characters playing multiple functions within a family and a household. These roles, besides daughter, wife and mother, could include concubines, mistresses, widows, all kinds of "in-laws" and serving maids. These roles dominate traditional Chinese writings and were clearly viewed by male literati as the core of the ideal female roles. However, if one set of heroine roles was prescribed by cultural and historical norms of classical high literature, there was a second set of images, defined by means of fictional

[83]The May Fourth Movement was a cultural movement that began as a demonstration on May 4, 1919, when Chinese students marched against the Versailles decision to give the Chinese province of Shandong to Japan. It became a period of Chinese history that witnessed the flowering of modern and creative literature. On May Fourth Literature, see the classic study by Chow (1960), but also Goldman (1977).

[84] For more self-portraits of women in modern China, see Wang Jing (2003), a translated anthology originally complied by Xie Binying, see Xie (1945).

literary portrayals. These descriptions produced wise, intelligent and active female characters who correspond to Pearson and Pope's hero roles such as "The Sage," "The Artist," and "The Warrior."

The first set of images can be seen as the "primary" set of kinship-defined roles describing any female human being depending on where she is in her life-cycle. When portrayed through fiction, the "primary" set is not overwritten or rejected, but expanded by a "secondary" set of non-kinship-defined roles describing women as, for example, travelers, critics, artists, students, teachers, readers, revolutionaries (this list is not exhaustive, either), all of which can fit into Pearson and Pope's hero roles of "The Sage", "The Artist," or "The Warrior." Hence, a daughter can be a student, a concubine can be a traveler and a mother can be an artist.

Although Pearson and Pope's classification requires a few adjustments, it still offers a valuable approach to viewing women as being able to play hero roles while occupying the traditionally allotted heroine roles. Acknowledging the possibility of co-existence of hero and heroine roles, Pearson and Pope open a space where male and female characteristics can meet on common ground, a space where new definitions of womanhood can find place. Celebrating male and female characteristics and combining them in one personality has made it possible to discover and demonstrate "full human capabilities" (Pearson and Pope, 1976:11) that are present in all of us. Hence women's portrayals of themselves as "intellectual and sexual, aggressive and nurturing, independent and loving, effective in both the public arena and at home" (Ibid., p.11) allow them to construct positive, powerful and wholesome self-images. When female autobiographers of the 20th century chose to portray themselves, they did so with an awareness of their ability to act energetically in other contexts than male writers traditionally allotted them. They portrayed themselves as independent, strong and complete in themselves, fusing the previous definitions of womanhood with the new perceptions that defined them as being capable of active heroism and autonomous decisions.

One individual who may have witnessed how traditional heroine roles underwent a metamorphosis is the sinologist Florence Ayscough. In her book *Chinese Women Yesterday and To-Day* (1938) she portrayed the differences between Chinese women "then" and "now" and made an attempt to give, if not equal importance to the manifestation of both masculine and feminine characteristics in female images, then at least recognition of their co-existence. Witnessing a cultural transformation in China at the time of writing her book, she showed her reader the versatility of manifestations of traditional female images (including the obligatory maidens, wives

and mothers as well as the dignified and active artists, warriors and educators) together with manifestations of modern female images in the case of women who could now take any occupation they wished. Ayscough thus portrays female doctors, nurses and teachers, lawyers and writers. The latter category is represented by modern female writers among whom are two persons who are subjects for the present study – Chen Hengzhe and Ling Shuhua (Ayscough, 1938:108). Putting these female writers on an equal footing with Ban Zhao, the great female scholar of the Han dynasty, Ayscough acknowledges their talent as women literati and their contribution to the literary renaissance in China:

> Miss Sophie H. Chen is one of the best known. She uses English as easily as she does her own language, and edited a *Symposium on Chinese Culture* published by the Institute of Pacific Relations (…) Miss Lin Shu-hua is a novelist whose main theme is the life of woman and her reactions to society (Ayscough, 1938:108).

Although she did not study Chinese women in terms of being heroines or heroes, passive or active, subordinated or dominating, Ayscough presented a range of female image types in her book that almost word for word resembles the classification of literary images that Pearson and Pope worked out some forty years later. Ayscough portrays Chinese women not only as "Maidens/Daughters," "Wives," and "Mothers" but also as "The Artists," "The Warriors," and "The Educators" (male roles in Pearson and Pope's terms). Distinguishing these notions to describe Chinese women, Ayscough, moreover, added one other important category to the roles of Chinese women. The role of "Educator." As Chinese literature traditionally had a didactic purpose, it might be assumed that female autobiographies examined in this dissertation might have a didactic flair to them. Therefore, adding the category of "Educator" to the six categories that Pearson and Pope have suggested with their typology can be very valuable in the assessment of female images through female autobiography.

One of the most essential features of the process of transformation of the traditional heroine role into the hybrid image that includes male hero qualities is the female character's conscious decision to play an active role – a decision to act. Thinking in Porter Abbott's terms and his definition of literary character and action as the two most important constituents of a narrative, it can be said that only when a female character takes an action in a narrative, can she begin to play a hero role in it and come closer to becoming complete in herself. Even though she might have to combine this active role with the passive roles of virgin, mistress or helpmate, it is the action that makes her *also* a hero. Writing an autobiography can be such an action and autobiographer can

become not only a heroine, but also a hero. The next chapters will therefore proceed with the analysis of a selection of modern female autobiographies to determine whether these Chinese women used autobiographical space to include such so-called male characteristics as independence, adventurousness, leadership and strength and present themselves in the garments of a hero.

Chapter Three

Chen Hengzhe: A Scholar's Portrait of China

1.Introduction

The autobiography which is examined in this chapter belongs to a woman scholar Chen Hengzhe. Unlike her contemporary Yang Buwei's more traditional portrayal of her personality which I address in the next chapter, Chen Hengzhe's approach with her *Autobiography of a Chinese Young Girl* (1935) is more experimental. Her objective is not so much a portrayal of herself as an individual but a depiction of a whole generation of young Chinese women like herself. Transcending the person-centered convention of autobiography as a genre, Chen frames her narrative as didactic reading material for the masses. Furthermore, by claiming that her book is "the universal and the human" (Chen, 1935:iii) rather than "the spectacular and the sensational," Chen positions herself as person who is able to see the consistent patterns in the nature of cultural evolution across the globe. Only a highly educated person with serious historical training could claim to be able to see the common trends, the universality and the human dimension of the historical path in China and the rest of the world and have the authority to interpret them. Trained in America, Chen acquired an excellent command of English and used this ability to write her autobiography in English. This step not only allowed her to become a cultural ambassador mediating between China and the West, but also to gain an authoritative standing of a transnational scholar. Therefore, this chapter views Chen Hengzhe as female cultural interpreter who appropriates the role of the scholar and historian whose academic background allows her to see the bigger picture of China and become the world educator.

The roles of Scholar and Educator are not distinguished into a category of its own within the typology of female portraits suggested by Pearson and Pope. However, as they never claim that their typology is comprehensive, it is tempting to add a female scholar to this range of portraits. Combining the qualities of a sage and an artist, a scholar possesses the great wisdom of a sage who understands the world and engages in artistic creative processes such as writing poetry, painting or

playing music. In Chinese tradition, though, a scholar is the one who belongs to the public realm[85] which had conventionally been occupied by men and was closed for women per definition,[86] and therefore can be viewed as the manifestation of the utterly male hero role. Furthermore, a position of a scholar signified years of education, painstaking studies of the classical works and passing multiple examinations.[87] To construct her image as a woman scholar, this chapter will show how Chen Hengzhe arranges her narrative in such a way as to fit her early life into this path of academic progress which was made possible by new situation, new attitudes and institutions in China.

Although it has been necessary to expand Pearson and Pope's typology with extra roles of a scholar and an educator, it is still very useful in assessing all the other female roles that Chen Hengzhe either sees herself performing or allocates to the women in her family. Thus she portrays female artists in her family, who achieved notable distinction. She describes her mother as a helpmate for her husband setting their relationship against the traditional institution of arranged marriage; she shows with her own example how the role of a warrior, idealized during early adolescence, can lose its attractiveness for a grownup; she exhibits how her aunt, a wise and talented woman, a sage destined for greatness, was hindered from achieving leading positions in life by the constraints of traditional cultural norms.

Using education as the main theme of her narrative Chen designs its plot as a story of her younger self's gradual coming to knowledge. However, the reader is never mistaken about the fact that Chen tells this story from the point of view and the retrospect of her older self – a woman of academic achievements. She uses the stereotyped insights that the West had accumulated about China though centuries, such as victimization of women through the traditions of footbinding and parental pressuring in marital affairs, and deconstructs this knowledge by constantly showing the unknown or less known details of Chinese culture to her Western reader. She also uses a strategy of cultural comparison and, by placing Chinese and Western social phenomena side by side, demonstrates cultural similarity and universality.

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[85] Although being a scholar generally meant active participation in official life, many male literati chose voluntary self-exclusion from public life in favor of a life as hermits (*shan ren* 山人) in the mountains. However, as Berg argues, such reclusion in the mountains or in the countryside on the part of the literati often represented a mere attitude in their minds (Berg, 2013:103).

[86] Ban Zhao is perhaps one of the very few exceptions from this rule and can serve as an example of a female scholar (and historian!) in Chinese history. For biographical information on Ban Zhao, see Peterson (2000:98-103). For studies of her life and work, see Swann (1932), Hinsch (2010).

[87] For a comprehensive study of China's civil service examinations, see Miyazaki (1976) and Elman (2000).

The images that Chen Hengzhe presents for her reader, the female roles that she chooses to foreground in the characters of her narrative, the plot that she fits them into and the perspective of an intellectual who evaluates her life and her China, are designed in such a way that the Western reader cannot but acknowledge the accuracy of her analysis. Indeed, Chen's autobiography can be taken as a scholarly analysis of a current situation in the field of Sino-American relations where she employs the examples from her personal life in order to present a well-argued analysis for her fellow intellectual peers in China and Western countries.

This chapter, thus deals with a life-narrative that, until very recently, was practically unknown by scholars and ordinary readers. The broad Chinese audience discovered only in 2006 with Feng Jin's translation of this volume from English into Chinese, that Chen Hengzhe, a known May Fourth female writer and historian with many literary and scholarly publications, had also written an autobiography. Feng Jin notes that, prior to this translation, Chen Hengzhe's autobiography had been unnoticed by Chinese literary scholars. As for the scholars belonging to the English-language study of modern Chinese literature, she acknowledges that Wang Jing (2000) was the first scholar to become aware of this English autobiography which she had analyzed in her own dissertation (Feng, 2006:11). While Wang views Chen's autobiography in terms of Orientalist representation, other recent scholarly works examine it either as a feminist representation, as a mode of cultural interpretation or as an example of intellectual stance.[88]

One of the reasons why Chen's autobiography was overlooked for such a long time might be connected to the issues of its publication. Compared to the Yang Buwei's and Ling Shuhua's autobiographies, to be discussed below and which were published abroad and enjoyed quite broad attention, Chen's text must have been published with very few copies and probably from her private funds. Looking at the copy of the original book, which lacks the basic biographical information, it becomes clear that it must have been a gift from Chen herself to her American friends, as this manuscript bears no mentioning of the publishing house or the year of publishing. Indeed, myself holding a copy of the original from Vassar College library, I only encounter one date which is available in the end of the foreword stating: "Peiping, China. September, 1935" (Chen, p.vii). Otherwise, this book bears no other signs of dates. During my research I only came across one other scholar's mentioning of another copy of Chen's book also without publication date which is situated in the East Asian library of the University of Chicago (Cheng Tieniu, 2010:80).

[88] See Wang Jing (2000), Feng (2006), Cheng (2010, 2011, 2013), Gimpel (2015).

It is safe to suggest that Chen wrote her autobiography around 1935, as she mentions in one of the concluding chapters of her narrative having witnessed a forest fire while travelling in Canada: "I remember having watched a big forest fire in the Canadian Rockies while travelling two years ago from Vancouver eastward" (Chen, 1935:161). It is a documented fact that she was touring with lectures in Canada in 1933, which is exactly two years before 1935 – the year of writing. If it feels like detective work trying to figure out the exact date of her narrative, what seems more important is to find out why she wrote it around this very time. Are those friends that she claims to have inspired her to write this autobiography (Chen, 1935:iii), the ones that she had met while voyaging in Canada? Was it Hu Shi's influence (being one of her closest friends) who had published his life-narrative in 1933 and coaxed other outstanding members of Chinese society to do the same?[89] Or was it Chinese and Western writers such as Lin Yutang and Pearl S. Buck who had written books about China around this time (see Chapter 1) that she responds to? Whatever her motives were, it seems that only a very limited circle of friends and acquaintances were aware of her contribution, a contribution that was deemed to stay in oblivion for many decades. Recent scholarship, fortunately, shed light on this unusual text providing invaluable insights on the historical period in China's history when women took decisive action to describe their lives.

In spite of the different approaches to Chen's autobiography, generally, all scholars assess her *Autobiography* as a story of her younger self, where she had portrayed her life since childhood to the time when she sailed for America, 24 years old. Indeed, the plot of Chen's narrative evolves around her recollections about her early childhood and upbringing according to the traditional customs adopted in elite families. She vividly narrates her early lessons with her father, who had selected a rather unorthodox approach to her education, an approach that had proven to be unsuited for a child like her. Her journey towards education continues with the examples of more successful

[89] If Chen Hengzhe does not openly acknowledge Hu Shi's influence on her decision to write this autobiography, some other female autobiographers do. As Wang Jing observes, a writer and scholar, Su Xuelin 苏雪林 (1987-1999), "a faithful disciple of Hu Shi" (Wang, 2008c:74) in her autobiography *Wo de shenghuo* 我的生活 [My Life] (1967) "quotes Hu Shi's call for autobiographical writing and cites his *Si shi zishu* 四十自述 [Self-Narration at Forty, 1933] as an example to follow" (Ibid., pp. 121-2). Indeed, Hu Shi, the one who opened a new textual space for self-expression in modern China, is also credited as a major influence by Yang Buwei whose English autobiography will be examined in Chapter 4. She recollects in the preface to the 1987 Chinese edition of her autobiography how Hu Shi gave her a few words of encouragement and expressed his faith in her ability to write down the events of her life (Yang, 1987:3-4). The fact that she acknowledges his influence on her writing only in the Chinese version of her autobiography could reflect a simple decision to foreground the relevant coaxers depending on her reading audience. Hence, in the English version she gives her foreign influential friends the roles of coaxers, while the Chinese version gives this honor to Hu Shi.

experiences she had when her Third Uncle gave her lessons and, later, with miserable experiences at the Medical School for girls in Shanghai. After a few years of depression caused by uncertainty about her future, she describes an opportunity to take examinations at Qinghua College which, in case of success would give her access to education abroad. Chen concludes her narrative with something that can almost be called a cliffhanger, picturing herself on board of the steamship S.S. China heading to America. The reader is left with a feeling "of what happened next?"

Some scholars have marveled why a successful writer and a scholar, who must have been about 45 years old at the time of writing her autobiography, finished her narrative so abruptly, much before the real success came to her.[90] Others have pondered on the possible reasons for the exclusion of the details of her roles as a wife and a mother from her narrative.[91] Such speculations rise possibly from previous research on Chen Hengzhe's life and writings, which positioned this woman as an exceptional individual who achieved many "firsts" in her life and had every reason to exhibit them. Indeed, it has become somewhat fashionable to repeat that Chen was the first in her family to attend a modern school; she was one of the few Chinese girls who for the first time in China's history were sent to America to study through the Boxer Indemnity Fund; she was the first to have used the vernacular to write a literary piece, while student in America; and finally, she was the first female professor to teach Western history at Beijing University! (Cheng, 2013:739). Why did she not make use of these achievements for her personal life-narrative, telling only of her early years instead?

An attentive reader will notice, however, that Chen Hengzhe, in fact, did mention some of her grownup achievements in her autobiography, albeit rather briefly (Chen, 1935:136, also p. 152, 188). Although Chen's autobiography does foreground experiences of her childhood and early adolescence, her narrative is therefore undoubtedly used to define some of her personal triumphs (or her "firsts") thus constructing her image as a scholarly achiever. Actually, it is exactly the awareness of her own accomplishments in literary, historical and academic fields that allow Chen as an adult narrator to center her autobiography on a story of her younger self. Declaring herself a specimen representative of a whole generation of Chinese girls (Chen, 1935:vi) she moreover

[90] These questions are raised by Wang Jing, who sees such an ending as a clear contribution to Chen's Orientalist position (Wang, 2000:65); also Feng Jin asks the same questions and seeks answers in Chen's own argumentation for this decision, see Feng (2006:13-14).

[91] Wang Jing concludes that it was a common trend among Chinese women autobiographers of the twentieth century to exclude personal details of their later family lives (Wang, 2000:206).

demonstrates that many of the firsts that she achieved in her childhood and youth were also firsts for most Chinese girls of her age and family standing. Nevertheless, what distinguishes her from the rest of her contemporaries is her decisive action to apply her literary and academic skills to become a cultural interpreter of Chinese culture for the West through the genre of autobiography. By assuming the position of a scholar who, as a trained historian, could portray China's difficult transition towards modernity, Chen Hengzhe put herself in a position of power, defining her China on her own terms. The aim in this chapter is thus, through a close reading of Chen Hengzhe's narrative, to distinguish the most important female images that she selected for the purpose of building her scholarly argument about the dangers of uncritical and indiscriminate favoring of the old cultural institutions and the images that highlighted the importance of education in creating an environment for tolerant and mutually-appreciative intercultural communication.

I would like to work with an assumption that this autobiography was never meant to be a story of a personality (unlike Yang Buwei's narrative to be discussed below) and therefore did not have to include a long list of the glorious details of her professional accomplishments and personal aspects of her adult life. There are many indications to support this point of view. For instance, Chen Hengzhe bluntly admits that her autobiography is "not for an exhibition of the ego" (Chen, 1935:vii) which is also the reason, as she explains, why she used a pseudonym, Chen Nan-hua. When Chen used her early life "as a kind of specimen" (Chen, 1935:vi), she deliberately chose a part of her life when she, still an anonymous girl, whose ego of the accomplished writer simply did not yet exist, could claim herself as representative of many other girls of her generation and family standing in China. Hence, obliterating her own ego and portraying herself as a representative of a whole generation, she demonstrated a collective image of girlhood in a state of transition. It is important to bear in mind, however, that no matter what Chen believes in negating an exhibition of ego, she as a narrator of this story is the grown intellectual self. It is this "self" who responds to the encouragement of her friends to portray her country as only a native can; it is this "self" who is painfully aware that things are about to go terribly wrong for a younger generation of women not only in China but also in the world and in this autobiography responds to the injustice of what she calls a "backward" (Chen, 1935:iv) movement of female emancipation. It is also this "self" whose ego is big enough to claim that her experiences are

> quite worthy of the serious attention of modern sociologists; for they not only are concrete examples of the moral life of the generation that I belong, but also they furnish a good historical background for the moral controversies that have arisen in modern China under the influence of the older culture of Europe and that of the newer culture of Soviet Russia (Chen, 1935:43).

These words echo to a high degree the words of her close friend Hu Shi who in his *Life-narrative at Forty* (1933)[92] expressed a firm belief that his life account might become useful for future historians (Hu, 2005:15). It is very likely that Chen Hengzhe closely followed Hu Shi's project of life-writing and, encouraged by his call for autobiographical literature in China and by her foreign friends, positioned her own experiences as material worthy of future scientific study.

It can be said that Chen's autobiography is not only about her younger self but also about her country and her people. She adds the cultural and social dimensions to the personal narrative by acting as a spokesman on behalf of the whole of China while insisting that she has "tried to paint China as she is, without either glorifying her merits or exaggerating her faults" (Chen, 1935:iii). In her intention to portray China's "internal personality" (Chen, 1935:iii) instead of its "external clothes" (Chen, 1935:iii), Chen Hengzhe addresses her Western readers with a message that there exists a China quite different from the one they are used to seeing. If we interpret "external clothes of the nation" as the images with which China had been stereotyped and the "internal personality" as the real and authentic story behind the stereotypes, it can be said that Chen Hengzhe with her autobiography aimed not only to show her own genuine China but demonstrate the versatile nature of China's personality "with its many-fold manifestations, sometimes evolving, sometimes involving, sometimes going forward, sometimes backward, but always moving on, like a river that has sprung from a lofty mountain must move on" (Chen, 1935:iii). She was therefore also warning against the images of China that had populated the public imagination abroad for so long.

2. Contradictions and Conflicts in Chen Hengzhe's Autobiography

Chen Hengzhe's *Autobiography* has raised many inquiries due to some of its unusual, and for some, even contradictory features.[93] Indeed, written in English, it tells the story of the life of a Chinese girl. Offering her reader an autobiography, the author reveals in the foreword that she would rather remain anonymous and use a pseudonym. Even the narrative organization, although suggesting the structure of any average chronological autobiography, contains a surprise in making an opening with no less than a literary piece. The table of contents announces a foreword and fifteen chapters

[92] Hu's autobiography was written in Chinese and intended for the Chinese audience, or to be more precise, for the Chinese intellectuals who, as people of great achievements, could benefit history if they wrote their autobiography after his example (Hu, 2005:15).

[93] Feng (2006), Wang Jing (2000), Cheng (2010, 2011, 2013).

which show a progression in the author's development – from "The Misty Past" to description of the parents in "Father and Mother," then "Early Education and Environment" and so forth to the final chapter "From Tutoring Children to Studying Abroad." However, the very first chapter (A Prelude in Parable) with the title "The Yangtze River and the Grand Canal" is a piece that Chen had previously published in Chinese in 1924 in a periodical called *Eastern Miscellany*[94] and now included as an introduction to her life-narrative. Two scholars who have done meticulous studies of Chen Hengzhe's autobiography, Cheng Tieniu (2009, 2011, 2013) and Denise Gimpel (2015) discuss this literary piece which metaphorically depicts Chen's own journey towards independence, modernity and education. The river as Cheng argues, is "a metaphor for a woman" (Cheng, 2011:259), in this case, for Chen herself and other pioneering women like her. Coming down from the dangerous Sichuan mountains, which are symbolic of a male oriented society, the river gains in strength and confidence, reflecting Chen's own life journey full of obstacles and struggles. The conversation that takes place between the Yangtze River and the Grand Canal reflects, according to Cheng, two categories of women: the one like herself, who shapes her own life and the other one, shaped by a male hand, who accepts her lot and lives according to the rules of the male world (Cheng, 2011:260). While Cheng views this allegoric piece of writing as the interaction between the feminine and the masculine forces, Gimpel treats it in terms of the concept of "destiny" (Gimpel, 2015:73). For her, the river symbolizes a person's ability to "take his own destiny in his hands and to create something personal and individual" and eventually join the ocean becoming something more profound than the territorially limited man-made Grand Canal (Gimpel, 2015:75).

It seems that, just like the journey of Yangtze River, this autobiography, became a project that reflected Chen's attempts to disseminate her message without the well-intended help of the editors and publishers that would make her narrative into another "Grand Canal" shaped by others.

The conflicting nature of the paratexts of this autobiography seems to creep into the narrative itself; it offers many contradictory and polarized portrayals of Chinese traditions and iconic roles. Feng Jin, having translated Chen's autobiography, has discussed this text as full of contradictions, reporting on her gaining an impression that Chen could not decide for herself whether she was a supporter or an opponent of traditional Chinese culture (Feng, 2006:32). However, Chen Hengzhe had already established in the foreword to her narrative that her aim was to portray the "many-folded manifestations" of Chinese culture, which necessarily suggests that she

[94] See Gimpel (2015:74).

would give her reader a glimpse of both China's merits and faults and speak of the positive and negative effects Chinese traditions had had on her people.

In order to test Chen Hengzhe's autobiography against Pearson and Pope's typology, it is first necessary to distinguish just what images of herself and other women she chose to portray in her narrative. This task would perhaps be rather challenging if I was "convinced" by her remark that this text is about her youth only and therefore omits the romantic, marital and professional sides of her life or, as she puts it herself: "this book contains neither the gentle art of the parlor life nor the soft romance under the moonlight, fascinating and amusing as these themes may be" (Chen, 1935:vi). In this case I would probably be limited to viewing her life from the position of the "Virgin" or "Daughter" roles only. However, a close reading of Chen's autobiography was rewarded by many sudden discoveries, which allowed me to map a quite detailed and varied picture of the many roles Chen Hengzhe wished to attain herself or expressed through her female family members. Thus several generations of her female ancestors are artists, belonging to the literati families which ensured cultivation of their talent. Women of the close family are portrayed as wise mothers, educating daughters in an appropriate conduct, and as virtuous wives, managing households and their husbands. There are portraits of chaste widows who, as victims of tradition bear their suffering with dignity. There are also examples of vulgar and ignorant women who, by their behavior and bad habits, manage to ruin lives of honorable men. Outside the family, women in Chen's narrative acquire heroic connotations, as they are teachers, doctors and revolutionaries. Many of these heroic women are Western icons which Chen learns about through reading of magazines and book translations. All these female portraits are assessed by Chen Hengzhe herself from the position of yet another role of a woman with academic achievements – a scholar.

Most scholars who have studied Chen Hengzhe's autobiography noted that the main underlying theme of this narrative is Chen's burning desire for education, which was a driving force for her self-development (Wang Jing (2000), Cheng (2010), Feng (2006), Gimpel (2015)). While I do agree that Chen Hengzhe positions education highly on her autobiographical agenda, we should, however, not overlook the grown and accomplished woman Chen Hengzhe who tells the story of her early life from the position of her older self. Therefore, besides the focus on education, she addresses many other issues concerning traditional values. Among those are old traditions, incomprehensible and cruel for a young girl. When viewed by the older Chen, they acquire new

dimensions as from the position of her age she can relate and understand them differently and even see some good seeds in them.

The presence of Chen's older "self" can be felt through the abundant remarks that she makes when reflecting on events from her past. The personal self that she presents in her autobiography is not only her young childish self, who subconsciously knew that she was designed for something more that simply marrying a man of her father's choice and to "live and die like an insect" (Chen, 1935:71). Speaking to her reader through the voice of the intellectual and assessing and explaining the social realities of her country, Chen Hengzhe constructs other images of herself. Hence, the images that she chooses for her younger self are those of an intelligent child, who was adventurous, curious and eager to learn, qualities which helped her achieve her goal and get an education. At the same time, the reader gets a glimpse of an intelligent grown woman who reflects on the ways she evolved and comes to a deeper understanding of what made her the kind of daughter she was, the kind of mother that she would become. This understanding comes from her re-evaluation of the personal relations with her parents and other relatives and the feelings that those relations evoked. As the grownup Chen understands herself better and therefore the images that she constructs in her autobiography become convincing.

This chapter views the female images that Chen Hengzhe constructed for her autobiography in order to show China to her American readers from two main positions: old traditional China and China in transition. Here I will consider how she portrays old China through the traditional imagery range of her family members; China in transition between old and modern values will be shown through the images of Chen's childhood and youth. The portraits that she constructs are constantly commented on from the position of her older self, Chen Hengzhe the omnipresent cultural interpreter. When she takes this role, confirming and dismantling the stereotypes about China, she illustrates that there are exceptions to the rules, whether because of regional differences, educational standard, or family standing. What is so special about Chen Hengzhe's approach is that she addresses the traditional Chinese institutions and old customs evaluating them from the point of view of the older generation and from the perspective that she has gained through the years. Thus, the institutions of family and marriage, the tradition of binding feet and the custom of taking concubines are addressed in her narrative from three different points of view: that of the older generation of her parents who were brought up with them never questioning their validity, of the younger generation like herself, who would rebel against them and, finally, the generation of

modern intellectuals who could evaluate and assess and explain those traditions. When Chen Hengzhe employs the narrative device of approaching her story from these three perspectives she not only succeeds in offering the reader a broader and deeper understanding of China but also adds an invariably human dimension to her autobiography. She demonstrates that issues of generation gap, the clash between parents and their children, the incompatibility of traditional and modern views have been existent in all cultures and ages, and China's troubles and difficulties might be related to similar struggles elsewhere in the world.

3. Old China Represented through Traditional Female Images

To give her reader a picture of old China Chen Hengzhe employs images of female relatives and sets them against powerful traditional institutions of family and marriage. Her mother and her paternal aunt Chen, to whom she dedicates her autobiography, are singled out as role models and the most inspiring elders of her childhood. Through the description of these two women, who represent all the qualities of an ideal cultured Chinese lady, Chen demonstrates the admirable and inspiring sides of traditional China. However, she does not leave the ugly sides of Chinese traditions without attention. A few examples from the lives of her other relatives illustrate the negative side effects Chinese customs could have on people.

Already at the very beginning of her narrative, she establishes the very fine and artistic background for the female members of her family. She goes as far back as her great-grandmother's generation to portray this woman as a talented lady of her time who started a tradition "under which almost every woman, born in or married into the Chen family, has been more or less artistic or literary or both, either by natural inclination or by force of environment" (Chen, 1935:5). In this way several generations of women in her family – grandmother, mother and various aunts – are described as highly talented ladies who distinguished themselves in the fields of painting, poetry, or calligraphy. The images of high class Chinese ladies as being merely confined to their inner chambers acquire another dimension when their traditional roles as wives and mothers are expanded with the roles of female artists. For Chen's mother, who is "a very wonderful woman and a very talented artist" and "still enjoys a reputation as one of the leading woman painters of the Chinese school" (Chen, 1935:6) the role of artist proves to be of crucial importance. When Chen's father finds himself out of work for some time, her mother supports her family financially by selling her

pictures and teaching girls to paint (Chen, 1935:177-8). Chen's mother is portrayed as being "a popular member in her circle of friends and relatives" (Chen, 1935:30) who, in sharp contrast to her highly irritable husband with his uncontrollable temperament, was cheerful and easygoing by nature and could even out any conflict. Through this image of her mother Chen gives a picture of what kind of training a Chinese woman received in matters of conduct:

> Even in the earliest childhood, she was trained to be patient, to be able to bear any injustice and any wrong that is done to her, always to keep silence unless she was talked to, never to show any emotion, especially with regard to love and marriage" (Chen, 1935:21).

Although such training that tallies with classical roles proved to be very valuable for her mother's marital life with a husband who was "a passionate man, tender in heart, but very violent in temper" (Chen, 1935:22), Chen Hengzhe the grownup notes that

> However admirable this kind of training might be when tempered with moderation, yet it was most mortifying to the blooming life of the young people. In my opinion, the harm that such a training does far outweighs the goodness that it brings (Chen, 1935:21-22).

This comment exemplifies the attitude modern intellectuals like Chen herself developed towards the excessive practice of traditionally "correct" female behavior according to classical texts and the reader senses the feeling of bitterness on the author's part, having been subjected to that kind of training herself. Several times in her narrative she discloses the effect of this training on her younger self. When made to memorize dull and difficult books on medicine, she did not dare to express her wish to at least be allowed to study poetry and learn how to write it, as this was what she loved most. As she regretfully remarks: "on account of the particular type of moral training of the Chinese students, I never dreamed of expressing this wish to the elders" (Chen, 1935:39). She recollects an episode when she was nine years old and felt a sudden urge to express her inner feelings towards nature's beauty in a "poem" and how she was particularly ashamed when her mother discovered her writing and demanded to see what was written on the piece of paper that her daughter tried to hide. For this feeling of shame Chen again blames the old moral training: "I was so ashamed to have expressed my feelings in that poem – a Chinese, especially a Chinese woman, was taught ever since early childhood to hide his or her emotions (Chen, 1935:39). No matter how limiting to the expressive nature of human beings, the correct female upbringing in old China was nonetheless the only way a woman could perform her roles of a virtuous wife and a good mother taking care of her husband and her children.

Chen recalls how her mother would tell her children certain stories about her marriage with their father which illustrated for them the difficulties that she had to endure in her marriage and

what she had to bear "in order to save this home from being wrecked" (Chen, 1935:23). With these examples, Chen's mother provided memorable examples for her children educating them in the conventional attitudes towards love and marriage. Following a strongly established tradition of female moral instruction, practiced since Ban Zhao's *Lessons for Women*, Chen's mother fulfills her role of "a good mother" when she instructs her daughters in the rules of correct female behavior. Although Chen Hengzhe never mentions being instructed in this text, the connection to Ban Zhao's precepts is obvious. The reader also gets a strong feeling that Chen is indirectly criticizing this "traditional" image.

In spite of the turbulence in her parents' marriage, Chen states that it was a marriage based on love. Her father was often away to study for his civil examinations at the capital which, as Chen realized when she was growing up, was quite hard on her mother, who must have missed him very much (Chen, 1935:28). Although Chen's mother never showed her longing to anybody, much less to her children, Chen Hengzhe recollects one episode when her mother's loneliness became obvious to her. It is very curious that Chen employs a very traditional mode of portraying her mother as a woman who, longing for her absent husband, sits down before the window to write a poem about her languishing:

> One evening, during one of my father's many absences, I saw my mother sitting by the window alone; and as she watched the moon which peeped in through the window, she began to write something on a piece of paper. I conjectured that it was a poem, though my mother was never known to be able to write poetry; moreover, I decided that it was a love-poem for my father. I saw that she noticed my attention, but perhaps she did not realize that I suspected that much, nor had any idea as to the extent of my curiosity. As soon as she finished writing, she tore that piece of paper into shreds, and threw them into a big pen-case which was a kind of vase that held a number of pens. I do not think she ever sent that poem to my father, for evidently she must have believed that to express one's intense emotion even to one's husband was poor taste! (Chen, 1935:28-29).

This episode where Chen Hengzhe uses her mother's example demonstrates that correct traditional female behavior demanded of a woman to hide even her feelings for her husband. Raised by her mother under the same moral rules and etiquette, Chen learned to hide her own expression of inner feelings as well. The reader can sense it in Chen's description of another episode where her mother discovered a poem Chen had written on a piece of paper. Chen narrates:

> It was a spring morning, and as I lay on my bed, I thought of all the beautiful flowers that must be again blooming in our big garden. Suddenly I felt a strong urge to give an outlet to my surging feelings, namely, to write a poem. This I did, most poorly done, but it satisfied me at the time, and relieved my pent-up emotion. As soon as I had dressed myself, I began to copy this "poem," but suddenly my mother appeared. Seeing that I was hastily hiding something from her, she demanded to see it. I was so ashamed to have expressed my feelings in that poem – a Chinese, especially Chinese woman, was taught ever since early childhood to hide his or her emotions, – that I ran as fast as I could, grasping that piece of paper in my hand (Chen, 1935:39).

In spite of the prescriptions of proper behavior that dictated that Chinese conceal their emotions and in spite of some difficulties in Chen's parent's marriage that her mother had narrated to her children, Chen is quite sure in her deduction that the marriage was blessed by mutual love. With the examples of some of the other family members later in her narrative, Chen illustrates how terribly wrong a marriage could turn out in old China. The destiny of a prearranged marriage could go either way; it could become a blessing or a curse. Therefore Chen demonstrates that parents in China, especially those from cultured literati backgrounds, considered this matter as of the greatest responsibility on their part. With the example of the betrothal of her parents, Chen gives her reader an insight into the many-faced nature of the logics of arranged marriage, depicting one of its manifestations as an act of friendship: "My paternal grandfather and maternal grandfather were colleagues in the official realm in the Province of Chekiang: and a token of their friendship, my father and mother were betrothed to each other at the age of seven and six respectively" (Chen, 1935:18). Thus friendship and appreciation of each other's family status made it possible to connect families on equal basis with a perfect match:

> As I have already said, marriage in old China was a matter of parental responsibility, and no respectable family would allow its sons and daughters, at least ostensibly, to have a voice in a matter which concerned the happiness of their own future life. (…) Since both my father and mother belonged to the literati families, they were naturally made to behave according to the standards of their class, and therefore were never allowed to see each other until they were married (Chen, 1935:18).

Admitting that many quarrels between her parents were due to their very young age, Chen Hengzhe also demonstrates how the cultured background of both her parents made it possible to overcome marital difficulties, accept and enrich their relationship. Thus Chen describes that her father was a great admirer of his wife's talent and being "a competent connoisseur of art" (Chen, 1935:22) offered encouragement and guidance to his wife. Chen admits that it was due to her father's "creative criticism" (Chen, 1935:22) and advice that her mother achieved excellence in her work. He was so anxious for the improvement of her art that, as Chen's mother would describe it, "he made it a rule for me to paint a piece each morning before I attended to the various duties of the house-hold" (Chen, 1935:23). Later Chen would discover that "whenever my mother had something important to paint, my father always offered his advices, and she would not start the work until they had decided as to what 'structure' or outline that particular painting was to have" (Chen, 1935:22). This demonstrates that, although a Chinese woman could be born with a talent for artistic expression, she still needed male guidance for her talent to break through and reach its excellence. The remark, made by some of the children after their mother's very vivid portrayal of the hardships she had to bear with their father, is very illustrative of this point: "'But Mother', some of us would

say, ‘he has helped you so much. You admit that without his advice and inspiration, you would have remained an artist of mediocrity’” (Chen, 1935:23). Later Chen Hengzhe herself would give a male member of her family, her beloved Third Uncle, the honor to have awakened her talent, or rather, a desire for education, which would result in her achieving excellence in scholarly work.

Another inspiring female figure that Chen Hengzhe foregrounds in her narrative is her paternal aunt Chen, her father’s elder sister, who functioned as a wise and gentle guardian during the most difficult and dark period in Chen’s life:

> She was a talented woman, with an all-round accomplishment, so that not only was she a poet and calligraphist of a very high order, not only could she prescribe a medical recipe that would astonish the professional doctor and cure the patient; but she also could cook the most delicious dishes I ever tasted in childhood, and rear rare herbs and plants for her spacious private park (Chen, 1935:143).

Here Chen’s aunt is accorded an important place among the talented females of the literati Chen clan. If Chen’s mother is portrayed as a capable female artist, good mother and a virtuous wife, this aunt’s figure is even more distinguished:

> [S]he was an unusually tall and big woman, she impressed me with the bearing and dignity almost of a queen. Even now, I could not think of her in terms other than great leader; and if she had been born forty or even thirty years later, she would have proved, with this remarkable personality and those [sic] knowledge and talent of hers, what climax [sic] a Chinese woman was capable of climbing in the matter of career and leadership (Chen, 1935:144).

When Chen describes this lady with all-round accomplishments in almost majestic terms and capable of reaching any heights if born at the right point in history, she points at the Chinese woman’s great potential. At the same time she reveals what kind of hindrance tradition had posed on a woman’s greatness and criticizes the limitations of traditional images and spaces of activity. In Pearson and Pope’s terms Chen’s aunt can be viewed as a sage who possesses wisdom and knowledge but is unable to translate her understanding into productive action and achieve personal fulfillment because she is limited by the social roles prescribed to her.

Having had an emotionally sad childhood, because she was not her parent’s favorite child, it seems important for Chen to establish that she was her aunt’s “favorite niece.” She calls her aunt “one of my two loving and appreciative elders” (Chen, 1935:143), (the other one being her maternal Third Uncle), partially perhaps because she was the one who saw how miserable and brokenhearted her niece was lacking attention from her parents:

> She often said to my mother and father: “Don’t be foolish and lavish your attention and affection on a child like your oldest daughter, but try to appreciate this daughter of yours and overlook her faults, - for such

> children must have faults – and you will discover someday that your affection and attention would be justified!" (Chen, 1935:143).

Thus she portrays this aunt as a more motherly and affectionate figure than her own blood mother, which may explain the resolution she had made in her young days to love her children equally when she had them as well as to treat everyone in a just manner "even servants" (Chen, 1935:42). The feeling of being unjustly treated by her parents and other elders of her childhood is a theme that Chen returns to with meticulous persistence, making this feeling responsible for the overarching ability to feel deeply all injustice in the world. One of the reasons for her autobiography is exactly to address the injustice in the condition of women whose rights are being taken from them. In a way, the grownup Chen seems to re-live all the injustice that she experienced in childhood and now, being able to articulate her feelings, she pours all her passion into letting people know her pain in a controlled and scholarly manner.

Having demonstrated how much suffering a child can endure when she does not feel the unconditional love from her mother, Chen also shows, on the other side, that a mother can love her child so much that it can cause a disaster. A matriarch of the family, a great leader with "bearing and dignity almost of a queen," Chen's aunt, had "one mortal fault" – "her blind love for her only son" (Chen, 1935:145) which made her unable to interfere with her son's poisonous habit of opium-smoking. "A good man himself" (Ibid., p.145) he took this habit from his wife, who turned out to be "an ignorant and vulgar" (Ibid., p.145) woman. As a result of this addiction, this couple caused their family's ruin. Having portrayed a more or less happy outcome of the arranged marriage with the example of her parents, Chen Hengzhe used the example of her aunt's family to illustrate not only the devastating consequences of a prearranged marriage in case one's spouse turned out to be an unfit match, but also to describe the disastrous effects of the habit of opium-smoking. In a style similar to Liu Xiang's *Exemplary Biographies of Women*, which has a section describing the consequences of immoral and vulgar and wicked female behavior (Hinsch, 2010:132) which could even cause the fall of a dynasty (Ibid., p. 114), Chen also demonstrates how an ignorant and vulgar woman contributed to the total destruction of the life of a good and honorable man.

The unfortunate consequences of the tradition of arranged marriage are also addressed through the portrayal of the female role of "a virgin widow," which required a young woman to join the household of her parents-in-law even if her husband-to-be should die prior the wedding. Although the decision to become a virgin widow was voluntary, the freedom of choice (depicted by Chen as "a human" element in Chinese life (Chen, 1935:44) in practice was rarely exercised by the

girls belonging to the literati family. A cultured and learned girl would rather accept the fate of a virgin widow than be gossiped about and stigmatized by society as unworthy. Chen Hengzhe vividly describes a story of a virgin widow that she had learned about as a child. A young girl who was betrothed to a young man from Chen's close family chose to accept the role of "a virgin widow" although her bridegroom was already dead. The bridegroom's parents (who, as Chen reveals later, are her aunt Chen and her husband) belonging to the literati class gave her the possibility to either join their household as a virgin widow or marry somebody else. Chen's comment on this proposal offers an explanation for her foreign reader in terms of the flexibility of old Chinese mores:

> It must be said that cruel as some of the social customs were in old China, the individuals were fortunately human enough to allow this bit of elasticity to that rigid system of moral standard (Chen, 135:44).

However, being from a literati family, this girl could not bear the idea of becoming "a pretty butterfly" and joined the family as a virgin widow. The very noble and filial decision on the part of that girl must have been devastating for her young psyche and did not save her from withering away within a year after the pro forma wedding ceremony. Although this outcome is portrayed as a horrible consequence for a young life, the alternative would be even worse. Chen demonstrates that a girl would have to endure an unbearable amount of shame if she was deemed "a pretty butterfly," as the weight of public condemnation would not allow her to have a normal life. This is the state of affairs that Chen Hengzhe presents for her western readers, pointing out that social stigma "was a harder cross to bear that my western sisters could imagine" (Chen, 1935:46) and although there was a place for human sympathy in Chinese traditions "yet the social weight of opinion was so heavy that that little element was easily crushed under it" (Chen, 1935:46).

With this she also demonstrates that, although the association with the class of literati can prove to be a blessing and allow the blossoming of female talent, such an association can also prove to be a curse in terms of the rigid moral norms that are inherent to the literati class. She does, however, provide an example of more relaxed and human conditions for the people from the lower social strata:

> Men and women saw one another often, in the fairs, in open fields, under the blue sky and white clouds, by the bank of the river or at the the head of a stream. They sang love-songs to one another, they laughed and chatted, and often they were good friends before they were married. But this state of affairs were looked down upon by the educated Chinese, deeming it vulgar and fit only for the poor and ignorant (Chen, 1935:41).

The social life of the middle and upper classes in the old China thus stands in sharp contrast to the "lower class" (Chen, 1935:40) who were not touched by "the teachings of the ancient sages" (Chen,

1935:40) and whose life was "was much more natural and gay" (Chen, 1935:40). Girls from respected families should always have husbands, never lovers. They had to marry according to their parents' wishes and must not meet their husband prior to their wedding day. And should their husband-to-be die prior to this day, they should willingly accept the fate of a virgin widow. Chen Hengzhe shows her own distaste for these old traditional mores with a question for her reader: "Was it strange then that a young Chinese man or woman should regard marriage with indifference, if not with repulsion?" (Chen, 1935:41). At the same time she shows her awareness that exactly these values, after a whole generation had rebelled against them, receive new appreciation at the time of writing. She therefore criticizes those people who have allowed the wheels of emancipation to go backwards in admiring some old features of Chinese traditions that were directly harmful for women. Thus she attacks the idea of welcoming the tradition of virgin widow back in the following words:

> Admirers of the abstract in the Chinese civilization may share the rejoicings of the old Chinese gentlemen and say that this is verily the spiritual height of sacrifice and that it ought to be encouraged in a generation which does not even apologize for its frequent divorces (Chen, 1935:44).

For a person like her, "with a healthy and sympathetic heart" (Chen, 1935:44), "who has taken an actual part in the burial of many decaying institutions and beliefs" (Chen, 1935:v), the idea that she will have to witness "these half-buried things attempting to rise up from their graves again" (Chen, 1935:v) is intolerable and only points to the inevitable failure of the freedoms that women had achieved.

Having attacked the institution of marriage, she furthermore blames the institution of family or, to be more precise, the big family that supported "the existence of some stupid convention towards marriage and divorce" and altogether was responsible for ruining the lives of Chinese young men and young women for centuries (Chen, 1935:154). When she describes the phenomenon of the "all-powerful" big family system in China for her western reader she makes it clear that, although a big family was the rule in Chinese society, there were bound to be exceptions. With the example of her own family she demonstrates that often people lived in smaller units that resembled western families:

> All the homes that I knew intimately in my childhood had been branches of big families, thus resembling the small families in western countries. For example, my father's own family was made up of his wife and children, though one or the other of his brothers would visit us with some member of their families (Chen, 1935:154).

It is curious how Chen Hengzhe inscribes a modern ideal of a small family which, in Denise Gimpel's words, "allowed each member to develop its potential" (Gimpel, 2015:79) into a traditional family where she grew up herself. Her mother, although giving birth to eight children is portrayed as having developed her talent for painting. Just like her mother, it was clearly Chen's intention to develop her own potential in the literary field, an occupation which required time, peace and practice, which in turn suggested a small family of her own. This, however, did not turn out the way she and her husband, Ren Hongjun 任鸿隽 (1886-1961), had hoped. In her letter written in 1924 to her sister-in-law Chen Hengzhe regretfully notes that her husband's dream of a small family where she would have peace and quiet to develop her literary talent did not come true and that was something that she was "deeply ashamed of" (cited in Gimpel, 2015:79). This feeling of shame about unfulfilled dreams might even be one of the reasons why she had to exclude many details of her private family life from the autobiography since she so openly advocated the small family units as being a natural state of affairs since her childhood.

However, in spite of the similarities with the western style family size, China's traditional attitudes towards marriage did not prevent highly cultured literati families from steering the lives of their sons and daughters into the tragedies that Chen Hengzhe describes using the example of her father's older brother. Having dedicated an entire chapter of her autobiography to the topic of traditional Chinese family and marriage, she illustrates how so many family members belonging to the different branches of the large Chen family had had to lead an unhappy existence having married a person ill-suited to their personality. Along with the images of unhappy young women, such as the one who, unable to marry a man of her wishes, became a Buddhist nun (Chen, 1935:160), there are also images of unhappy young men, such as her father's older brother who, having divorced a vulgar wife, could not marry a woman he fell in love with and, disillusioned with his future, never got married again merely taking two concubines just to spend his time with (Chen, 1935:159).

Such circumstances make her parent's marriage look extremely blessed with happiness and fortunate enough to have been a good match. Having witnessed so much injustice done to young people's lives and being herself one of those who had almost been forced into an arranged marriage, it is no wonder that she expresses such strong resentment to the revival of the values that nourished those kind of tragic experiences:

> Yet there is recently an ever-increasing chorus in praise of the big family, not merely in the old conservative circle which naturally would uphold this ancient institution, since that was the best system they knew; but what is almost unbelievable, this chorus is being sung among some of China's young men – never by the young women, be noticed – and by some of the enthusiastic western admirers of China's old culture. Many of these latter friends, in their enthusiasm to praise and appreciate the old culture of China, have overlooked the huge human price that has bought that spectacular grandeur of the so-called "spiritual civilization" of our country" (Chen, 1935:160-161).

Appealing to humanity in general and to the "western friends of the Chinese culture" in particular, Chen Hengzhe's main goal is to reveal the "the double-sword nature" of Chinese culture arguing that "while some elements in our culture must doubtless be preserved, yet an unconditional support for the preservation of everything pertaining to this culture is fraught with future dangers" (Chen, 1935:161). Chen Hengzhe must have believed that, with this autobiography, she contributed to a more subtle description of Chinese cultural traits, positive as well as negative, acting as a critic of those who spoke for the revival of traditional values.

As Wang Jing and Cheng Tieniu agree in their analyses (Wang, 2000:198; Cheng, 2010:73), Chen's autobiography can be viewed as a response to a very famous book *My Country and My People* by Lin Yutang and to some degree as a response to Pearl S. Buck's introduction to Lin's book and her own fiction writings of the time such as her novel *The Good Earth*. This response is clearly of dialogic nature, and Chen's autobiography can be viewed as engaging in a discussion about traditional Chinese institutions with other author's texts. As Wang notes, in his book Lin Yutang

> nostalgically writes of the traditional Chinese family structure, old Chinese ideals of womanhood, concubinage, chaste widowhood, and footbinding, which he claims was loved and accepted by Chinese women. (…) He openly advocates "helpful wife" and "wise mother" as the proper roles for women and takes modern women to task for their pursuit of sexual equality, independence, and self-expression (Wang, 2000:198).

At the time of writing his book, Lin Yutang was perceived as one of those who could explain Eastern and Western cultures to each other. His ability to communicate his knowledge about China and Chinese culture in a language that the Western public could understand and relate to established his reputation as a trustworthy authority on Chinese matters. Therefore, Chen Hengzhe could not bear the idea that his views on traditional gender roles would be perceived as the only truth. Pearl Buck's introduction to Lin's book, where she had expressed Western envy of "the simplicity and security of China's pattern of life" (Buck, 1936:ix), must have also provoked Chen to such a degree that she had to say that "the enthusiastic western admirers of China's old culture" (Chen, 1935:161) do need a better understanding of the double-sided nature of this culture in order to realize the huge human price Chinese people had to pay for adhering to the old customs.

Hence, from the above it can be seen that some of the images that Chen portrays of the old China might conform to the Western stereotypes about women as oppressed, subjugated to the horrid practices dictated by the tradition. Among those are the images of her mother's generation as women brought up according traditional moral training taught to be patient and being able to tolerate any injustice and show the minimum of emotions. There are images of chaste widows who had to sacrifice their youth for the future of loneliness and despair. There are unhappy young couples unfit emotionally and intellectually but still forced to live a life together because their parents had decided so. However, as a cultural interpreter, Chen invites her reader to look at the other side of Chinese tradition and provides images of traditional women who were blessed with great artistic talent and had an opportunity to develop it. Thus the example of her talented mother or her aunt, a potentially great woman who, had she lived at another time, would have achieved the highest positions in Chinese society, must have been quite revealing and informative for a Western reader who otherwise would not have a possibility to have a glimpse inside the inner chambers to view a life of a talented Chinese lady.

When portraying traditional aspects of Chinese old culture, Chen Hengzhe does not deny the stereotypical conceptions about China that the Western reader might go specifically after in her narrative. Instead, she reveals some other, less known details about the lives of Chinese women within the compound which add to a deeper and more versatile understanding of life in China. But what is more important in my view is that she adds a human dimension to those stereotypes by explaining the human price Chinese women and often also men had to pay for the sake of tradition. The very convincing, very personal stories taken from her own family's history make her message acute and legitimate. Her warning to "some of the influential leaders both of China and of the civilized world at large" (Chen, 1935:v) against "their sympathy and moral support" (Ibid., p.v) to old traditional institutions is therefore sent from the positions of a woman, a human being, an intellectual, and a scholar.

4. Images of Chen's Younger Self as a Reflection of China in Transition

Chen Hengzhe portrays the transformation within China's major cultural institutions such as footbinding and education through her experience. The atmosphere of change that affected the time

when she was growing up resulted in the revision of ideas about what roles were accessible for women and how they were to play them.

The young Chen Hengzhe is a child who is different from other girls. She is adventurous and curious and behaves "more like a boy than a girl" (Chen, 1935:12). Unlike Yang Buwei, who even had a boy's name and was dressed in boy's clothes,[95] Chen's "boyishness" manifests through her behavior and through her intellectual ambitions. She climbs ladders, plays hide and seek and desperately wishes to be able to flies kites, play shuttlecock and other, what she calls "harmless," games that usually appeal to children. However, considering those kind of games "fit only for a street child" (Ibid., p.9), her mother, herself a cultured lady, applies all the rules and practices that she herself was brought up with to tame Chen's "wild nature" (Ibid., p.9) and teach her "to behave like a lady" (Ibid., p.9). Although she tries to imagine how unhappy she must have been because of all the prohibitions and taboos, she does not blame her mother for that:

> Yet it was such a prevalent state of affairs at that time that nobody in particular should be held responsible for the suppression of this wholesome instinct in the children, least of all should my mother be blamed for her disapproval of those games, for she thought only for the best of her children's future (Chen, 1935:9).

The reader gets a hint that the time she refers to as "that time" is when the old Chinese ideas about the correct female upbringing had not yet been challenged and therefore were perceived as the only right way to cultivate a female child. Therefore being a lady also meant footbinding. However, Chen uses this "woeful custom" (Chen, 1935:11) as a stage for exhibiting the meeting of the old with modernity, the clash between the two forces and the victory of the latter. Her own life serves as the example of what this confrontation resulted in.

For centuries the tradition dictated that, in order to become a perfect lady, small feet were necessary.[96] At the turn of the century, this custom "was just beginning to receive attacks from a few enlightened persons" (Chen, 1935:11). The persons she refers to must have been Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858-1927) who was one of the first to attack footbinding, and his disciple Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873-1929).[97] Furthermore, she gives credit to the influence of the West[98] and the Manchus, founders of the Qing dynasty, for the beginnings of the transformation:

[95] See below in Chapter 4.

[96] For a thorough study of this custom, see Ko (2005). For an early and influential study, see Levy (1966).

[97] On the theoretical attacks against footbinding that Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao initiated at the turn of the 20th century, see Hong (1997:63-7), for further references, see Ebrey (2003:251).

> Both the influence of the western peoples and that of the Manchus must be given the credit for having opened their eyes for the absurdity and cruelty of this custom, though in their propaganda they generally put emphasis upon the example of the Manchu ladies who had natural feet and who represented the aristocracy in China then. (…) Superficial as the logic of these social reformers was, nevertheless they did help the little girls in a most marvelous way. For though the elders might not agree with this point of view, they at least realized for the first time that the justice of such practice was open to question. And that was a long step forward (Chen, 1935:11).

With this not only does she show her awareness that, although the intentions of the reformers and the antifootbinding movement were shallow and did not concern real sufferings of little girls and women, this step away from tradition towards modernity had a tremendous effect on the future of women of her generation.

It did not mean, however, that the shift towards modernity was painless. Although Chen's mother was inclined to let her feet grow naturally as the natural feet movement was getting stronger,[99] it was a very conventional and strict maternal grandmother who objected and forbade such thoughts. Chen Hengzhe, as a cultural interpreter, explains that this step was necessary in times when it was very difficult, if not impossible, to find a husband for a girl who was not a perfect lady with tiny feet. As a little girl, Chen objected strongly to the pain the bandages caused her and ripped them off only to get new ones in the morning. However, she notes that after multiple unsuccessful attempts to break her will and make her accept the inevitable, it was her mother, who as an artist "was apt to find the duty of foot-binding irksome and disgusting" (Chen, 1935:12) who let her daughter go free. With this, Chen ascribes an artist such qualities as flexibility of thought and adaptability to new notions and perceptions. Also with this example Chen demonstrates the inevitable clash of the old and modern views on footbinding and the difficult transition from a perfect lady with tiny feet to the ordinary girl with what her grandmother called "big boats" that could "ferry ten persons in them across the river" (Chen, 1935:14). Although she had won that battle, Chen admits that "it was rather hard for a girl to have feet different from those of the rest" (Chen, 1935:14) and she was "really embarrassed to be so different" (Chen, 1935:14). She does point out that, although embarrassed, she never felt sorry about this decision or felt ashamed. Perhaps it was the fact that she was often compared to a boy because of her behavior that had helped her to endure the embarrassment and constant harassment on the part of her grandmother. No matter how insulting it must have been to hear her grandmother's comments about her feet,

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[98] For a thorough treatment of the Western influences on the antifootbinding movement, see Chau (1966) and Drucker (1981).

[99] The antifootbinding campaigns of the early 20th century were just a part of a bigger discourse that can be characterized by the growing interest for promotion of women's physical education in general. For a useful summary on physical education and for overview of literature, see Gimpel (2008).

Chen Hengzhe hurries to explain that her grandmother was "thinking kindly" for her future when scolding Chen's mother for not being persistent enough with her daughter's footbinding:

> For the fear that a girl might not be acceptable to a mother-in-law on account of her big feet was the chief reason why that custom had been kept up for centuries, inspite of the suffering that it inflicted upon the little children and for all their lives. And since it was the duty of the parents to provide husbands for their daughters, they did not dare to take chances with their future happiness. Indeed this is still the strong reason that I now discover among the ignorant peasants in the country who still refuse to set free the feet of their daughters (Chen, 1935:14-15).

With this Chen explains the good intentions behind the gruesome custom illustrating the human aspect of an inhuman act. Furthermore, she draws her readers' attention to the fact that, even at the moment of writing, i.e. around 1935, this custom was still alive. However, now its driving force being ignorance, as it is ignorant peasants that still practice it (Chen, 1935:15). The way of the educated elite has not touched them yet and it is Chen's way of demonstrating that, although footbinding was also wide spread among the cultured circles in China, the educated minds were more prone to see the harm of this practice and abolish it. Thus Chen Hengzhe portrays herself as a girl who would never become a perfect lady, or maiden – denying these roles for herself. Instead, she would become a scholar, a role that she envisaged as much more significant for a woman.

Indeed, Chen Hengzhe, belonging to the educated circles with an intellectual background, uses her intellectual ability and intellectual aspirations as the strongest themes throughout the whole of the text of this autobiography. Already from the very first chapters she positions herself as coming from a literati family with long cultural traditions. This concerns not only the females in the family who, as mentioned above, were talented women, but also, and most importantly, the males of the family who were learned men, generation after generation occupying positions as magistrates. A magistrate, she explains, was a man who: "possessed all the legislative, judiciary, and executive powers in one single person, and was responsible only to a viceroy or a governor" (Chen, 1935:27). To avoid nepotism and to facilitate just and impartial decisions, Chinese customs dictated magistrates to serve far away from their own districts and provinces. Such forced migration as Chen explains, had many benefits since it "helped Chinese people to understand each other better" (Ibid., p. 27), promoted a common dialect known as "the magistrate's dialect" or "mandarin" (Ibid., p. 28), and, finally, "made the magistrates and their families more broad-minded than those who had never left their native provinces" (Ibid., p.28). In this manner Chen Hengzhe used the position of magistrates that men in her family performed with justice and an unprejudiced mind to declare herself as capable of playing the role of cultural interpreter for the West. Positioning herself as a

broad-minded and non-judgemental interpreter just as her male ancestors were true interpreters of the variations of Chinese culture for the Chinese, she appropriates the male position of judge.

> When I was a child, I often heard native families of my district spoke of strangers with contempt and snobbishness, but I never heard anybody connected with the Chen family spoke [sic] of a stranger with prejudice, simply because for more than one hundred years, our family was used to strange people and strange customs through the forced migration from one end of the Yangtse to the other. This is China's internationalism, and it is not so alien to the bigger internationalism of the world which was to make a strong appeal to me when I became a student in a foreign country many years later (Chen, 1935:28).

These ideas of cosmopolitan, liberal thinking, tolerance and justice that she portrays herself to have grown up with and which she became even more aware of and attracted to after her contact with the West are partially responsible for her becoming a person with an ability to understand and interpret unfamiliar or strange phenomena.[100] However, certain traits of her own personality are given just as much importance for her becoming someone more than just a perfect lady with a few talents.

The peculiarities of her personality – the adventurousness and boldness of her behavior, ambitious pursuit of education – and her boy-like feet all added to the elders' recognition of boyish traits in her. On several occasions in her narrative she highlights her hypothetic worthiness, hypothetic because, no matter how bright and intellectually promising a girl was, her qualities would be useless in the public realm unless she was a boy:

> Sometimes I was flattered when my elders said to my parents that it was a pity that I was not a boy, otherwise I might be able to bring great honor to the family. (…) an ambitious boy would be able to attain a high position in the nation, since all the social and official honors in China were based, at least theoretically, upon one's intellectual accomplishments (Chen, 1935:9).

Writing these lines from the position of a grownup who has achieved a position of an intellectual, she demonstrates how those traditional perceptions were hopelessly old-fashioned and how they were bound to be changed when women received access to public education.

The transition that China underwent in the field of education is especially illustrative in Chen's narrative. In large parts of the description of how she acquired an education prior to her departure to the United States she appears as a victim of this transition. The feeling of being a victim may have been felt more intensely because of her emotionally unhappy childhood.

> My early life was sad one at its best, and I was always unhappy, especially as I was a very sensitive child, and was understood by none of my elders. My father though me a queer child, though he sometimes took delight in the fact that I was rather bright. He often punished me severely and unjustly for very small faults. My mother was a kind person, but certainly I was not her favorite (…) When she was displeased with me, she very seldom

[100] For Chen's views of internationalization from the position of a historian, see Gimpel (2015:115-7).

> expressed her displeasure with anything other than a cold look and an indifferent attitude which, however, pierced my little sensitive heart like a piece of steel, and were more hard to bear than the blows from my father (Chen, 1935:32).

A victim of her own parents, she describes herself as a victim of early education. A male child in China started his education with having to memorize "*The Four Books* and *Five Classics*, right after he had mastered the *Thousand Characters*.[101] A girl might study only the *Four Books*, or even less" (Chen, 1935:36). However, in her case a sophisticated torture was inflicted on her when her father decided a different approach to her education:

> I was first taught to study *Erh-ya*, which was no less than a dictionary of synonyms. (…) and I was to memorize them all, dry, difficult, without rhythm, without meaning. (…) The second book that my father taught me was even worse. It was simply his notebook on the names of all districts of China, numbering about two thousand altogether! The third book was also one of his note-books on history, containing the titles of all the emperors of the past dynasties in China, with the numbers of years each of them had reigned (Chen, 1935:36-37).

It comes as little surprise that she calls those studies "the dullest and most miserable" (Chen, 1935:37) she was ever subjected to in her childhood. A few years later she would have to memorize eight volumes of a medical compendium called *A Physician's Classics,* merely because, on the advice of her father's older brother, her parents imagined that there was a future for Chen as a medical doctor.

> They [the eight volumes of *A Physician's Classics*] were written in the Han Dynasty, which was about two thousand years ago, though they were supposed to be the compilation of the conversations between the ancient "Yellow Emperor" and his chief physician, Chi-pai, on medical topics. (…) They were difficult books, and dry, too (Chen, 1935:38-39).

On top of these experiences, the three years she spent in the medical school in Shanghai exhibit the confusing and inadequate changes of the whole education system in China of that period. The three years at that school were unhappy, and among the three teachers there was only the teacher of English, a student returned from America, who knew how to teach and who brought a bit of light into the miserable existence of the young girls. The teacher of chemistry and anatomy, Miss Z succeeded in making her students hate everything she taught them, because "she knew almost nothing about the technique of teaching" (Chen, 1935:109). However, none of them complained, because as Chen explains,

> being all "green-horns" ourselves, none of us had any idea as to what a modern school ought to be like, so we accepted every arrangement that this school made for us from curriculum to the wearing of clothing. It was not until many years later that I realized that we had been the victims both of the new educational institutions in

[101] On early education in late imperial China, see Hsiung (2005), on female education in traditional China, see Cleverly (1985) and on the changes in approaches to female schooling in the early twentieth century, see Bailey (2007).

> China which were only in their infantile stage, and of an inadequately prepared teacher and leader (Chen, 1935:109).

Victim of her early education both domestically and in school, Chen Hengzhe was not completely unlucky in that respect. She devotes a whole chapter of her narrative to a happy year that she had spent with her Third Uncle's family in Canton (Chen, 1935:chapter 7). That year is portrayed as a period of competent teaching that was suitable for a child. Chen's beloved Third Uncle who had been exposed to the Western ways of living in Canton was very enthusiastic about modern education. The things he taught his niece, the textbooks that he used and the teacher that he had hired for her when unable to teach her himself provide an ideal picture of what a transition towards modernity should have looked like. It is also remarkable that two years after publication of her autobiography, Chen Hengzhe reworked this chapter into a Chinese version,[102] highligting her uncle's influence upon her and the long-term and profound effects his teaching had on her future life.

This influence, however, was not limited only to the innovative teaching methods that Chen's uncle applied for his little niece.[103] He also succeeded in imprinting his life-philosophy in Chen's mind when she was still very young, a philosophy that she would credit for helping her in difficult situations during the rest of her life. He taught her that, basically, all people are prone to behave and lead their lives according to three principles. She recollects her uncle's words as follows:

> I want you to know that there are three types of attitudes towards life in the different kinds of people; these are: the complacent attitude, the rebellious attitude, and the creative attitude. I have faith in you that you may create your own life, and I hope that you will attain the third type of attitude early in your life (Chen, 1935:150).

This creative attitude to one's own life, or *zaoming* 造命 as she later would translate it into Chinese,[104] means taking responsibility for one's own future. It means a conscious awareness that it is a person's attitude towards life that decides what direction his or her life-journey will take. With her autobiography Chen attempts to demonstrate that it is exactly this road that she had taken. In a way, attitude of being a master of her own fate, allows her to function as an authority of her own.

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[102]Dated to 1938, it was published under the title *Wo youshi qiuxue de jingguo* 我幼时求学的经过 [My early search of education], see Chen (1994:314-26).

[103] Chen's uncle was involved in many public educational projects, besides home-schooling his niece, see Gimpel (2015:19).

[104] The Chinese translation of this and other two terms (attitudes towards life) can be found in her autobiographical essay, see Chen (1994b). For a detailed discussion of these terms and how Chen employed them in her other works, see Gimpel (2015:73-6).

The fact that her autobiography does not have any foreword written by an influential male as a way of legitimizing its worth only supports this idea.

With an attitude of being one's own master Chen points at the same potential that any woman can and should cultivate in herself, essentially demanding the recognition of women's rights and intellect. Through the voice of the teacher hired by her uncle to teach her arithmetic she expresses male astonishment over her ability, after only four weeks, to learn the amount of material that usually took boys several months. This allows Chen to boldly claim that girls are brighter than boys transforming her hypothetical worthiness into actual ability and competence. As the teacher goes on reflecting on such a vast difference between the natural abilities of boys and girls, he concludes by saying that the reason for the better performance that Chen has shown is due to the fact that her mind "is fresh, being entirely free from any previous mis-teaching, while the boys, having been taught in the wrong way, have so much to unlearn that it takes more time and energy than the simple teaching" (Chen, 1935:84). By this she demonstrates not only a girl's natural talent for learning, but also criticizes the old-fashioned ways of teaching in traditional China. This episode also inspired her to teach her own children differently:

> Many many years later, when I became a mother myself, I thought of this idea, and found it a useful reminder in the teaching of my children either by myself or by their teachers. So I made it one of my "don'ts" [sic] in the education of children.
>
> Don'ts [sic] no. 1. "Don't teach children anything that they do not like, this only makes that subject repulsive to them." This lesson I learned from my father's teaching of me, for he never succeeded in forcing anything on me that I disliked.
>
> Don'ts [sic] no. 2. "Don't teach children any wrong subject, or the right subject in the wrong way, for it is far worse that leaving their minds empty and free." This lesson of course I learned from this mathematical teacher of mine" (Chen, 1935:84).

Chen Hengzhe demonstrates that transformation in the field of education at the turn of the century was more than the mere establishment of modern schools or introducing modern subjects into the curriculum. Writing, both fictional and non-fictional, is positioned as a central factor for the self-development of an intellectual mind. With the examples of the kind of literature that she had been influenced by, she portrays her own intellectual advancement. Thus having mastered the books that were assigned to her by her father, she could now freely choose what to read in her spare time. Her narrative provides a long list of literature that influenced her thought. Initially, drawn to the modern magazines that came to their home, she was attracted to the front cover pictures that they were illustrated with. These magazines (she speaks of Liang Qichao's journal *The Magazine for a New People* [*Xin Ming Congbao* 新民丛报]) contained such pictures as "the portraits of Bismarck and

Garibaldi, or the photographs showing the English Parliament or the American White House" (Chen, 1935:50). Unable to read them at first, Chen marveled at the novelty of their appearance enjoying numerous pictures. Later, about the time she turned thirteen, she shares with her reader that "I could forget myself between their covers" (Chen, 1935:50). Through Liang's magazines she learned about such figures as Cavour,[105] Mazzini[106] and Madame Roland[107] who were influential activists representing the revolutionary movements in their countries.[108] A little book about Joan of Arc[109] that appeared in her home would stir her youthful imagination for several years, along with images of Mazzini and Madame Roland. Besides Liang's influence she points to Tan Sitong's 谭嗣同 (1865-1898)[110] "Jen Hsueh, or The Philosophy of Humanity" (Chen, 1935:57)[111] where he generalized about the nature of human agency.[112] Chen comments:

> I was greatly impressed by its original thoughts, its bold attacks on things conventional, and its fearless searchings into the root of every question. It opened my eyes to a new vision, namely, that we must strip ourselves of our mental and spiritual clothings before we could ever understand ourselves and our problems. It was a Chinese version of "Sartor Resartus" (Chen, 1935:57).

Not only does she let her reader know what attracted her in this book, but she even provides a parallel to the western equivalent "Sartor Resartus"[113] helping her Western reader to relate to the philosophy and heroism of a Chinese martyr.

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[105] Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour (1810-1861), Italy's first Prime Minister, one of the leading figures in Italian unification movement. For his biography, see Smith (1985).

[106] Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) was a politician and activist for Italy's unification. For his biography, see Smith (1996).

[107] Marie-Jeanne Phlippon Roland (1754-1793) was a political activist and a supporter of the French Revolution (1789-1799). For her life and contribution to the revolution, see Abbott (1904).

[108] On Liang Qichao's biographical studies of Cavour, Mazzini, Madame Roland and other historical personalities, see Tang (1996).

[109] Joan of Arc (1412-1431), a martyr and a French heroine, a military commander during the hundred Years' War (1337-1453). According to Judge's observations "[T]he many Chinese accounts of Joan's life seem to have been based on Japanese biographies. These included Zhao's 1903 translation of Iwasaki and Mikami's collection" (Judge, 2008:160).

[110] Tan Sitong was a Chinese politician and reformist, one of the martyrs of the Reform Movement. For a short biography, see Chen Yutang (1996:945).

[111] What Chen Hengzhe refers to is Tan Sitong's famous politico-philosophical treatise *Ren Xue* 人学 [*The Doctrine of Benevolence*], see Tan (1981:367).

[112] For a discussion of influence of Tan Sitong's ideas expressed in *Ren Xue* on his contemporaries, see Zhao (1995:245).

[113] *Sartor Resartus* (1836) is a novel by Thomas Carlyle which purports to be a description of the early life of a German philosopher and his thought, see Carlyle (1897). See Drabble (1986:866-7).

Later, while waiting for admission to a modern school in Shanghai, she read a few books translated from Japanese, one of them being *The Poor Student*[114] which was a story about hardships of a Japanese student and made a deep impression on Chen:

> It told of the many hard struggles of a poor and lonesome Japanese student: how he went without food and in shabby clothes, how he managed to get the kind of education he aspired to, and how finally he succeeded in overcoming all the obstacles on his path and became a great scholar. (...) [It] served me as a good inspiration whenever I experienced distress, financial or otherwise, as well as giving me much comfort whenever I began to feel ashamed of my worn out clothes (Chen, 1935:98).

That Chen uses this novel to exemplify her own hard road to education is very illustrative, since she also became a scholar in the end, in spite of all the difficulties on her way. While booklets like *The Poor Student* inspired her and provided comfort in future difficulties, another book that she also read at the same time was the translation of Dumas' novel *La Dame aux Camélias*, this one, as she notes, for mere amusement (Chen, 1935:98).[115] As much as Chen would like to portray *La Dame aux Camélias* as light reading which was meant for entertainment, she also demonstrates that the Chinese attitude towards fiction as *xiao dao* 小道 ('minor way,' Ying, 2012:35) was changing, and the mere fact that she includes this title into her narrative points at another transition that was taking place in China. As Ying Liang in his article "The Translation of *La Dame aux Camélias* and Chinese Popular Culture in the 1890s" (2012) argues, Lin Shu's translation of this and other Western novels "made the novel genre a serious literary form in the eyes of Chinese readers" (Liang, 2012:35).

Later, during her stay at her parent's home in Sichuan, where she was summoned by her father who had arranged a marriage for her, she continued her self-education. After she had declared to her father that she would never get married, the furious parent proclaimed that he would not tolerate her in his house and stop supporting her financially. Only due to Chen's mother's diplomatic skills was it decided that the young girl would stay home for a year and then leave and start a life on her own. Determined that her future did not have anything to do with medicine, Chen Hengzhe used this year to study classical literature and practice calligraphy. In this way Chen demonstrates how she gradually built a solid knowledge base for her future self who one day would

[114] It was not possible to find any reference to this book.

[115] *La Dame aux Camélias* (Dumas, fils, 1848) was translated in 1899 into Chinese by Lin Shu 林纾(1852-1924), the greatest translator of Western fiction in late Qing China. This book was Lin Shu's best known translation and is considered to have played an important role in disseminating fiction at the end of the Qing period, showing that novels were not only designed for mere entertainment. On the reception in China, see Ying (2012:33). For a further discussion of this topic, see Hu (2000:67-105). For research about Lin Shu, see Lee (1965:159-93).

sail off to America. With a phrase that she told to her mother: "I like [sic] to know the real conditions in foreign countries, then perhaps I could do something to help China in her struggle for existence" (Chen, 1935:136), Chen tries to position herself as a young Chinese who was aware of the tremendous change that was taking place in China and that the knowledge from the world around China and about it would help this transition on the way.

Having stayed in Sichuan for a year, Chen left for Shanghai, a journey that lasted more than a month. This long and lonesome tour is portrayed in poetic terms through the description of nature and other simple pleasures such as reading and enjoying many delicacies that her mother provided her with (Chen, 1935:141). She reports having a complete set of Liang Qichao's writings as well as books with poetry from the Tang and Song dynasties (Ibid., p. 141). Later, during her two-year stay at her aunt's Chen, although heavily depressed by the unclear prospects of her future, continued her self-education. She painstakingly lists all the books that she managed to read:

> During these two years, I taught myself a few classics, such as the Classic of History; learned by heart many verses by my favorite poet, Li-po; studies, with the help of a dictionary, some advanced English literature, such as the poems of Robert Burns, some of which I would translate into Chinese for the amusement of my aunt; and above all, I learned to understand the meaning of life and its struggles in general, so that at this early stage of my life, living had already become a conscious process in my mind (Chen, 1935:152).

Although Chen Hengzhe does not make any conclusion about the effects of such self-induced extensive reading of different kinds of literature, this description is designed to make her reader aware of the extent of her knowledge even prior to her studies in America and establishes her academic foundation.

Reading literature not only established a solid base for her as a future scholar and writer, but also determined how her future life would unfold. As mentioned above, at thirteen years of age, Chen Hengzhe was exposed to the revolutionary ideas expressed by Liang Qichao in his journal *The Magazine for a New People* which contained translations and adaptations of Western literary works, biographies of exceptional historical figures and stories of their great achievements.[116]

> It was in this way that such persons as Cavour and Mazzini, Madame Roland and Kossuth, became known to the intellectual China; and it was in this way that such stories as England's struggle for constitution, the French revolution, the Unification of Italy and Germany, became attractive reading material for the Chinese people (Chen, 1935:49).

In this manner, figures as Mazzini, Madame Roland and that of Joan of Arc entered Chen's teenage mind and occupied it for years. As she describes her youthful vague longing to become a patriot, it

[116] For a study of Liang Qichao's activities connected with his publications, see Tang (1996).

is curious to follow how Chen's thinking on her own role in the revolution developed and changed. The desire to help China was common among intellectuals who shared Liang Qichao's views, however Chen is determined that it was the young people, herself among them, who felt and were affected by Liang's creative influence most. The figures of Mazzini and Madame Roland were introduced through Liang's magazines and for a long time, young Chen would speculate about their lives and ponder whether she would be able to go through the kind of punishment for the sake of the better future for China that these people had endured for their causes. It is remarkable that she rejected the figure of Mazzini simply because he was a man in spite of the fact that he possessed an undeniable intellectual quality. However, heroines like Madame Roland and Joan of Arc agitated her immature mind for a long time. Once having decided that it was less scary to be burned alive like Joan than be beheaded like Madame Roland, she would imagine herself as a warrior on a white horse, a role which seemed romantic and attractive for a young girl. Nevertheless, Joan of Arc was not her ideal heroine for long. By the time the Revolution of 1911 broke out in China and Chen received a real opportunity to become a revolutionist by joining a "Women's Daring-death Corps" she realized that her childish vague longing and ambitions had changed. Twenty-one years old in 1911, Chen Hengzhe, already a young woman, envisaged a different role for herself:

> I had become convinced that the role of a warrior was most unfit for a woman. It would make her harsh and vulgar, and it was a wasteful and destructive role at best. For I had now focused my ambition to intellectual achievements, and my only wish was to get a chance to go abroad to study the western life and culture at first hand (Chen, 1935:53).

In this way, Chen tears apart the ancient Chinese principle of *wen-wu* 文武, "*wen*, the cultural or civil, and *wu*, the physical or martial" (Louie and Edwards, 1994:139), that celebrates a traditional masculine ideal of hero as someone who both excels in his intellectual accomplishments and his military expertise. Rejecting the *wu* part as unfeminine and therefore unfit for her future pursuit of education, she chooses to focus all her attention on the intellectual side of this ideal. To prove herself worthy of *wen* qualities was a very ambitious move on her part. As Kam Louie argues, "*wen* has always been perceived as more elite than *wu*" (Louie, 2008:138). However, since it was considered that "women have not been able to attain true *wen-wu*" (Ibid., p.138), she had to make a choice between these two ideals. Thus the *wu* role of a warrior was portrayed as immature, as something a girl would dream of in her teenage years. And even if pursued into adulthood, a girl in this role would not succeed in achieving anything of real importance but rather become humiliated. Here is how Chen describes the poor outcomes of the girl-warrior patriotism with a feeling that she calls "malicious joy" (Chen, 1935:175):

> For the sake of narration, I may relate here, that almost none of these women-soldiers ever succeeded in killing a Manchu official, as they had out to do; nor did the Girls' Northern Punitive Expedition ever crossed [sic] the great river Huang Ho! Some of these girls soon became nurses, thus making themselves more useful; others became woman suffragists whose movement lasted for a few years after the Revolution. Quite a few of these would-be soldiers found it impossible to lift a gun, not to say using it; and many of them wept like a child because of this physical weakness! (Chen, 1935:175).

Behind this malicious mockery of the warrior role, which she perceives as unsuitable for a girl, a reader can sense Chen's own insecurity in this role and a relief that her refusal to participate in the activities of those girls' groups had saved her from failure and humiliation.

The change from the revolutionary ideas of a Joan of Arc-like Warrior to the "more sober one at desk with a pen and a book" (Chen, 1935:53) is presented as a natural course of events. Chen's literati background comes in very useful for proving this point:

> Such being the intellectual background of the young girl who had come under the magnetic influence of a writer like Liang Chi-chao [Liang Qichao], what wonder then that she should be so inspired as to concentrate all her vague longings and ambitions to the one definite desire of becoming a writer herself? (Chen, 1935:54).

It seems thus that Chen's big role model, Liang Qichao, was equally made responsible for awakening the teenage Chen's spirit towards a romantic role of a warrior and for her realization that her intellectual environment allowed for a more distinguished and respectful role of a writer. This role would not only prove her mathematics teacher right in his belief that "girls are brighter than boys" and verify her own worthiness of this postulate but also allow her to become a person of influence. As a writer she would combine both wisdom of the ancient sages with the creativity of a modern artist and the erudition of a modern, cosmopolitan scholar. Without any false pretentiousness, she declares that she has every right to be proud of her literati background, as it is this social class "that furnishes the brain of the nation and the Chinese nation has almost a born respect for their intellectual leaders" (Chen, 1935:54). It is this association with literati who "put intellectual achievements and personal character above everything else" (Chen, 1935:54) that allows her to assume a position where she would have the right to "judge humanity" (Chen, 1935:54).

As I demonstrate in this chapter, the autobiography of Chen Hengzhe is much more than a mere description of her youthful days with an abrupt ending. It is also far more complex than a simple response to the West or a feminist's indignant tale towards the world's leaders who take female rights away from them. With her narrative that addresses Western stereotypes she challenges widely accepted ways of portraying China by looking only at its "external clothing." Instead, she uses autobiography as a device for construction of herself as a person of authority and as a space for

argument, negotiation and interpretation of real and authentic China, revealing its "internal clothing." She also demonstrates that life-storytelling is certainly much more than a way of defining the personal "self." It can also become a space for representation of a whole generation of people, even a whole nation.

Western stereotypes are addressed from two positions – her younger self who had to endure some of the old customs personally, and from her older self, who evaluates her childhood experience and offers the insights into those events and situations as a grown, western educated scholar. Chen's autobiography becomes a transformative space where she demonstrates her personal development and together with it, a societal transformation from traditional to modern. The reader thus encounters images of herself rejecting the pain of footbinding and the consequences this rejection brings upon her when she has to endure the sharp criticism of the maternal grandmother and disapproval of the other elders. The ambition and intelligence that could characterize a boy and even bring future honor to the parents are the characteristics that follow Chen's description of herself throughout the whole of her narrative. With this she determines and justifies her role of a scholar-to-be from the very start. Using the background of her parents – a scholar and an artist – she validates her own talent for everything intellectual and creative and views as her right to judge and lecture, interpret and convince. In the same manner as female court historian Ban Zhao, Chen Hengzhe is empowered by her position and furthering her role of educator, she conveys her ideas in a truly monologic fashion. Her Western education and her status as a historian give her the authority to frame images of her country on her own terms and allow her to take the power/knowledge paradigm to China. As a literatus, she does not have to use the physical force of the woman warrior in redressing wrongs. Instead, she sees intellectual force as a much stronger weapon in an attempt to balance the differences between tradition and modernity, to point to the distinction between cultural pride and stupidity, to make a contribution for the elimination of cross-cultural misinterpretation and enhancement of true comprehension.

Chapter Four

Yang Buwei: A "Typical Chinese Woman's" Portrayal of China

1.Introduction

Yang Buwei's autobiography called *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman* was published in 1947 by the John Day Company in New York.[117] This life narrative, compared to the two other narratives focused on in this dissertation, comes closest to Western ideas of autobiography as a story of development and growth of one's character.[118] While this idea is well-applied to Yang's narrative, there are other important dimensions to it, as it is a story of the evolvement of her personality not just as a woman, but as a "typical Chinese woman" (Yang, 1947:3) who first and foremost is herself and "not somebody else" (Yang, 1947:4). Yang Buwei does not call herself "a kind of specimen" as Chen Hengzhe who hoped to become a role model for younger generation of women. Although Yang, just as Chen, admits that her autobiography was "written for readers of English" (Yang, 1947:x) and was a result of encouragement of her close Chinese and Western friends, she obviously pursues completely different goals than Chen Hengzhe. Not only is she not secretive about her own name and the names of the friends who coaxed her into this endeavor, she embraces furthermore the image of herself as a woman and communicates its complexity and diversity of manifestations through roles that she assumed during her life. Hence, in her narrative she establishes herself and authorizes her autobiography through three distinct positions: as a "typical Chinese woman" who holds much power in the family and defines herself through her family; as a "typical *woman*" with "an amount of vanity that becomes [her] sex" and who has gone through "unusual experience" in her life (Yang, 1947:3); and, finally, as a charismatic person with a unique personality and character traits, often describing herself with male characteristics.

Although most of the female images that Pearson and Pope distinguish for their typology can find their counterpart in Yang's rich manifestation of roles that she had assumed through her life, the range of female images that they suggest appears almost limiting when applied to Yang's

[117] In the following in order to avoid confusion, I will make references to Yang Buwei's maiden name (Yang) in spite of the fact that she published her English autobiography under the surname Chao which she took after her husband. See bibliography under Yang (1947) and Chao (1947).

[118] For one of the first influential studies of autobiography, viewed from the position that in his autobiography a man regards himself and his identity from a distance and acknowledges its development in time, see Gusdorf (1980).

autobiography. Indeed, Yang Buwei's narrative juggles with a rich variety of female images that it could alone serve as a source for assembling a comprehensive collection of womanly images. She portrayed herself as a school principal, a doctor, a traveler, a historian, an ethnographer, an educator, a birth-control promoter, a cook and a writer – to name just a few of the most eye-catching roles. However, in spite of Pearson and Pope's limited range of female images, their typology's obvious value is in its distinction of female literary portrayals into the typically female roles that characterize them as heroines and typically male roles that distinguish characteristics of a hero in the women. Female literary images, if described by men, are typically reduced to represent only soft heroine qualities of a virgin, mother and a helpmate. Such definition invariably limits the range of the activities allowed to women. When portrayed by women themselves, the female images, besides heroine qualities, can acquire characteristics of a typical male hero becoming more versatile and active in their role acquisition. The distinction between characteristics of a heroine and a hero that Pearson and Pope suggest is crucial in assessing Chinese female autobiographies as they are obviously authored by women and therefore, in theory, should allow them to take liberties in acquiring male roles.

The example of Chen Hengzhe has demonstrated how essential it was for her to establish strong associations with the male roles of scholar, artist and sage to authorize her intellectual autobiography of a woman. In Yang Buwei's autobiography, where she declares herself as first and foremost a person, a woman, and a Chinese woman, many of the roles that she employs for her portrayal are nonetheless also unmistakably male. While she continuously makes use of these male traits in her character to describe herself, she constantly leans against other important men in her life for support. She relies on her husband "letting" him translate her autobiography into English for her. She credits her grandfather as having had the decisive influence on her future when he had supported the breakup of her betrothal. She can also thank her father for sending her to a private school. Thus, in spite of her intention to portray a woman with personality, Yang reveals the dependence of a Chinese woman on a man and exhibits the impossibility of avoiding male presence in and influence on a woman's life and work.

Although Yang Buwei must have been aware of this male formative influence in her life, she, nonetheless, attempted to interpret China for the Western reader through her construction of multiple and complex images of herself as a Chinese woman and as a woman with extensive cross-cultural experience. Yang's account does not resemble Chen Hengzhe's narrative in which she acts

as a wise instructor and a scholar teaching the world how to behave and warning against the dangers of reversed emancipation. Yang Buwei is not solemn and formal like Chen Hengzhe, who teaches her reader to draw important lessons from the previous tragedies; instead, witty and entertaining, she invites her readers without any false modesty to share her personal accomplishments and losses. Her friendly tone welcomes her readers into her sitting room where she, juggling images of Chinese traditions and Western practices and their mutual stereotyping views, crosses the cultural boundaries so many times that they become non-important. Most importantly, she introduces the valuable perspective of an older and experienced woman who knows that in life, in a woman's life, everything has its turn and time. The acknowledgement of this simple truth is what makes her narrative sincere, trustworthy and pretensionless.

Although this publication saw the light of day in English, Yang Buwei originally wrote her autobiography in Chinese, as her English skills were too poor.[119] It was her husband, linguist Zhao Yuanren 赵元任 (1892-1982) [120] who can be credited with translating and editing her text. As she explains in the introduction to the 1947 edition, the idea for this autobiography was born at the suggestion of a renowned American female writer Pearl S. Buck who, in her turn, had asked Mrs. Lin Yutang, a wife to just as famous Chinese-American writer Lin Yutang, to write a short biography of Yang Buwei. At that time Yang Buwei had already published her cookbook *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese* (1945)[121] and since it became a huge success, the publishers thought it was only natural to provide a bit more information on an unusual author like her. Buck's request thus led to the initial considerations on Yang's part whether she should write an autobiography. Later, when Pearl Buck and Buck's husband, Richard J. Walsh, again indicated that the American readership would certainly show interest in such a book, Yang's considerations transformed into a firm decision. She elaborates:

> One night, at a dinner party, they told me that, when my cookbook was first published, a critic from Baltimore had exclaimed: "Well, this woman ought to write a book!" When I said: "All right, I am going to write an autobiography," they said: "Good, you write it and we'll print it" (Yang, 1947:ix).

[119] Yang Buwei also published the Chinese version of her autobiography, see Yang (1967); and, later, a memoir of her family, see Yang (1972).
[120] Zhao Yuanren excelled in linguistics, philosophy, music and poetry. For more detailed information, see Boorman (1967:148-152).
[121] See Chao, Yang Buwei (1972).

Buck's husband owned the John Day Book Company, a New York publishing firm that was known for publications of works and correspondence by some of the leading names on the world scene.[122] It comes as no surprise that among the books published by the John Day Book Company were the novels and essays by Buck herself and Lin Yutang who was a good friend of the Bucks. By virtue of these publications he became the most popular and influential interpreter of Chinese culture. Also Yang Buwei benefited from the friendship with these people. Having previously published Yang's cookbook it was only natural that the John Day Book Company would print her autobiography as well. However, since the company could not print in Chinese, the problem was solved very simply:

> we agreed that it would be much simpler to have the whole thing translated into English. At this, everybody around the dinner table looked at Yuenren, and here is the result of that book (Yang, 1947:ix).

Zhao Yuanren therefore plays the essential role in the making of Yang's autobiography, since everyone seemed to agree that he, a gifted and accomplished linguist, was the best candidate the job of translator. Moreover, their family friend, Hu Shi, who initially tried to coax Zhao Yuanren to follow in his steps and write his own autobiography,[123] was delighted to hear that Yang would write her life story instead. She recollects in her Chinese version of the autobiography how Hu Shi expressed his firm belief that she would surely show herself very capable in this endeavor.[124] Yang Buwei was thus encouraged to write her autobiography by her Western friends and received support and encouragement from her own husband. The support and influence of other close and prominent Chinese friends was just as profound and inspiring.

Since she both knew and was friends with Pearl S. Buck and Lin Yutang's family, it is very plausible that Yang Buwei had followed Buck's guidelines for what an authentic book about China should look like. Those guidelines or ideal qualities were laid down a decade earlier in Pearl S. Buck's introduction to Lin Yutang's *My Country and My People*. Calling his book "the truest, the most profound, the most complete, the most important book yet written about China" (Buck,

[122]Among the noted people whose works and correspondence were published by the John Day Book Company were the novelists Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945) and H.G. Wells (1866-1946), composer and pianist George Gershwin (1898-1937), scientist Albert Einstein (1879-1955) and Joseph Stalin (1878-1953), to name just a few. For further information, see Publishing Archives at Princeton (2003). See also Stalin (1931), Wells (1932), and Einstein (1933).

[123] In a preface to the new 1987 Chinese edition of her autobiography that was first published in 1967 (twenty years after the one in English), Yang recollects how Hu Shi initially tried to persuade Zhao Yuanren to follow his own example, however, Zhao would not even consider this suggestion due to lack of time. See Yang (1987:3).

[124] Yang mentions not only Hu Shi's encouragement but also his promise to write a preface for her autobiography. He never kept this promise, however, as by the time Yang's English autobiography was ready for publishing, Hu was no longer staying in America. See Yang (1987:3-4).

1936:xii), Buck had highlighted its qualities such as "truthful and unashamed of truth," "appreciative and understanding of both old and new," "written proudly and humorously and with beauty, seriously and with gaiety" (Ibid., pp. xi-xii). Yang Buwei's autobiography can be viewed as a female attempt to introduce a similar truthful portrait of China from a woman's perspective, where she demonstrates her own understanding and interpretation of China's traditional culture and practices and is proud of her origins. Her narrative is written humorously, but her humor does not belittle the significance and seriousness of some of the major historical events that she had witnessed both in China and abroad. As for the beauty of the language that Buck has listed among her requirements for the perfect book on China, this task was dealt with masterfully by Yang's husband when he translated it into English.

Compared to the two other autobiographies that are considered in this dissertation, Yang Buwei's is the longest with its 327 pages. It also has the most elaborate table of contents, divided as it is into six major parts, each serving as a line between the major stages of the author's life. After a brief presentation of herself in the "Introduction," she proceeds with the following headings: "Part I. 'Boyhood'," "Part II. Girlhood," "Part III. The Young Woman," "Part IV. And the Young Man," "Part V. 'Peaceful' Years," "Part VI. War Years" and finishes off with five "Appendices." These six parts, are arranged chronologically and contain 61 chapters with their own headings, some of which reflect the roles that Yang Buwei managed to play during her life: "The Filial Daughter," "Principal Yang Buwei," "My Hospital in Peiping," "New-style Wedding of New-style People," and "Professor's Wife." Some of these headings point in the direction of traditionally established roles of a daughter and a wife for women in China. At the same time, a Western influence can be anticipated when looking at the headings which point at the professional woman Yang Buwei – her as a school principal, as a doctor, as a modern person welcoming the new style of life and rejecting tradition. This autobiography is an example of how a woman managed to combine all these non-national manifestations of womanhood in one life-narrative without losing the major goal – presenting herself as a woman. Hence, although there are many noteworthy aspects to Yang Buwei's autobiography, I find that the most remarkable feature of her story is that it is not about a girl, a young girl, a little artist, a rebel girl, as other female autobiographers attempted to portray themselves, but a *woman*. She presents herself as a woman who is not ashamed of being one, a woman who embraces her womanhood with all the trivial, traditional work that this role brings with it, a woman who is aware that there are different stages of womanhood, each associated with activities proper to each stage.

2. A Woman Autobiographer

Yang Buwei's text, as stated above, is a narrative that comes closest to the modern Western ideas of autobiography being a story of an evolving personality. While Yang Buwei does concentrate on the variety of manifestations of herself as a woman, acknowledging that they might very well be contradictory, she also shows an awareness of the advantages and limitations of autobiography as a genre,[125] which in turn can be quite contradictory in terms of the truth and fiction it conveys.[126] Demonstrating an ability to make a sophisticated self-analysis and an awareness of the elusive nature of a self-image, Yang says:

> You may find that some of the things said above may contradict some of the others – that makes them all the truer. If I have not succeeded in being a perfectly coherent, rational personality, a true description of me cannot of course be a coherent, consistent description. But, anyway, all this is only what I think I am – no, not even that, it is only what I now think I am (Yang, 1947:5).

With these words she illustrates for her reader that people have different perceptions of their "selves" during different periods of their lives and that these perceptions might change. Therefore, the present autobiography that she shares with her audience is written from the perspective of the older Yang Buwei who has reconsidered her former perceptions of the self, and narrates of a person she now thinks she is. This telescopic view on her life and her personality demonstrates her insight into the process of constructing a self-image and its changeability.

Telling about her earliest childhood memories, she reflects on the impossibility of rendering them exactly as they were, without losing the deepest inner flavor they have to them: "Childhood scenes like those flash on and off quite unrelated, sometimes as if they belonged to somebody else or to some of my dreams. Like dreams, they lose much of their flavor when told in words" (Yang, 1947:19). At the same time, at the end of her narrative she reflects on some of the events that are too close to the present day to become autobiographical memories: "[I]t is hard to tell about yesterday and make it sound like autobiography. It is too near one to have any perspective" (Yang, 1947:302). However, Yang is convinced that both distant and yesterday's memories are worthy of inclusion into an autobiographical narrative of hers. She reasons that "a near-sighted perspective is a perspective" (Ibid., p. 302) just as the events in a distant past give their perspective. While it is probably impossible to render the exact mood and feelings about events in a distant past: "Events

[125] For the early and influential discussion of the limitations of autobiography as a genre, see Gusdorf (1980).
[126] For a discussion of issues such as truth and fictionality of autobiography, see Mandel (1980:49) who deals with such misconceptions as autobiography's unrealibility due to its being stamped as "essentially fictional."

are easy to describe, but hard to express the feel of" (Yang, 1947:185), Yang Buwei is convinced that autobiography, as a record of remote and close successive events, is capable of conveying a versatile perspective on a human life. She is aware that such contesting perspectives can add contradictions and incoherencies to her description of her identity, but she is convinced that it is these contradictions that make her portrayal all the truer: "a true description of me cannot (…) be a coherent, consistent description" (Yang, 1947:5). Therefore, when she invites her reader to get to know her saying that "If you want to know what I really am, you should read the story of my life" (Yang, 1947:5), she prepares him for the versatility and the contradictory nature of manifestations of human nature.

Together with an invitation to turn to the text of autobiography to discover the real Yang Buwei, she warns her reader of the additional distortions of her image due to the necessity of translating her narrative into English. She does not hide the fact that her narrative in English has to be a product of collaboration between herself and her husband who translates it from Chinese. However, she is painfully aware of the influence that her husband's translation would have on the image she had portrayed of herself and she alerts her reader to the consequences such translation can have on her real self. Although Zhao Yuanren, himself an outstanding linguist with a perfect command of the English language, performed this task masterfully, she felt that to a Chinese eye (here she probably refers mostly to herself) the outcome was not quite the same "her" as she intended:

> I can summarize my feelings about this English version of my autobiography by comparing it with a portrait of a Chinese woman in oil painting. An oil painting looks inescapably foreign to a Chinese eye. But if I have to be done in oil on canvas, I think this picture as about as near a likeness of me as I can get – next to the original in colors on Chinese silk (Yang, 1947:xi).

The awareness of what translation can do to the original text is indeed quite unusual for a housewife. While Yang Buwei, perhaps, was not much into scholarly thinking and only sensed intuitively how translators might modify the texts they work with, she nonetheless felt the urge to speak up every time her husband went too far making changes to her narrative. She tells her reader: "I have tried to catch him doing these things [changes to her style] and registered my protests in the form of footnotes, but I won't guarantee that I have not let some slip by" (Yang, 1947:x). From the point of view of translation theory, what Zhao Yuanren might have attempted to do was to domesticate her narrative by translating it in such a way to create the impression that Yang had written it in English

originally, hence bringing it closer to the English reader.[127] Yang Buwei complains that: "While he [Zhao Yuanren] tries to render my simple Chinese into Basic English, he constantly lapses into his academic style of involved classifications" (Yang, 1947:x). The foreword bears witness to a textual "battle" between the author and the translator where Yang protests against the changes that her misbehaving translator-husband had made to her text:

> But my husband has not always been a well-behaved translator. (…) In a number of places, my husband has changed things around, so that the outcome of an incident will be delayed until the end – That, my dear, is called "fictional technique" –
>
> But this is no fiction! I still like the straightforward way better and have insisted, in many cases, on keeping the announcement of the outcome at the beginning of a story. I believe in keeping the reader informed (Yang, 1947:x-xi).

In the beginning of this foreword ZhaoYuanren mentions that his wife began writing her autobiography in 1913, as a novel (!) because there had not been a suitable genre to record such a story in China at that time. His attempts to apply "fictional techniques" to it in his own translation indicate that in 1947 he still might have thought of it as a novel, perhaps even a Western-style novel, where the reader should be held in a state of excited expectation till the very end, unlike the traditional Chinese chapters of fiction that tell the story beforehand.[128] Whatever attitudes he might have had, it is obvious that Yang Buwei regards her story as more than mere fiction and wants her record to be straight, perhaps, just as straight as Hu Shi's narrative, to provide historical reference for future generations. This innocent and humoristic argument between a husband and a wife, an author and her translator, anticipated a heated discussion which would take place in academic circles a few decades later about the facticity and fictionality of autobiography, its historical and literary characteristics and value.[129]

If Yang Buwei had different opinions from her husband about the genre of autobiography and had mixed feelings about "a Chinese woman in oil painting," she was very clear about who her reading audience was and what implications this awareness brings to her narrative:

> The present book is not one of those "as told to so-and-so" stories, since I had it down in writing. Nor is it quite an English translation of a Chinese book, since the Chinese has not yet been published. When I do

[127] The idea of domesticating and foreignizing translation was introduced as early as in 1813 when the German scholar Friedrich Schleiermacher presented his views in the lecture called "Methoden des Übersetzens" [Methods of Translation] (Bassnett, 2014:16). These ideas laid the basis for the further development of the terms foreignization/domestication by Lawrence Venuti at the end of the twentieth century. For further discussion of these terms see Bassnett (2014:17).

[128] See, for instance, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Luo, n.d.)

[129] For an excellent review of the historical developments of attitudes towards autobiography, see Marcus (2006).

> publish the Chinese, it will not be the same book, either. For, to a Chinese reader, there will be no point in telling what weddings and funerals are like in China, while, on the other hand, a "ticket" from a traffic officer would take a lot of explaining before he understands that it is not a policeman's invitation to go to the theatre. So, although this book was written in Chinese, it was written for readers of English (Yang, 1947:xi).

None of the authors of autobiographies that are discussed in this dissertation, except for Yang Buewei, exhibit such sophisticated reflections about autobiography as a space for expression and construction of a self-image, a certain identity. None apart from Yang Buwei reflect on the implications that translation can have on the portrayed self-image or reflect on how their narrative changes when they decide who their audience will be. These qualities make *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman* most modern and exiting reading and its author a very human and intellectually bright woman who could think ahead of her time.

Another very distinct feature of this autobiography is its conversational tone. It starts off with a humoristic dialogue in the foreword where husband and wife, good-naturedly teasing each other, explain the design and the purpose of Yang Buwei's narrative. The idea of dialogism proposed by Michail Bakhtin (Renfrew, 2015:75) and originally viewed as the dialogue between literary texts acquires a different dimension in Yang's narrative. Here the concept of dialogue not only literally denotes a conversation between a married couple, but also means a generic dialogue between a man and a woman, a linguistic dialogue between author and translator, a cultural dialogue between author and reader, a literary dialogue between the genres (novel and autobiography), thus facilitating a unique frame for narrative communication on multiple levels throughout the whole text of this autobiography. The connection Yang and her husband established in the introductory part continues throughout the whole text in the form of footnotes where they exchange commentaries, which are supportive, suggestive, ironic and sometimes even sarcastic. In the later parts of the autobiography, the couple's older daughters join this conversation commenting on their mother's story in the footnotes and making their mother's narrative also their own. Yang Buwei's attempt to start a conversation does not limit itself only to the members of her family – she involves her reader in this conversation as well, making an external dialog between author and reader possible. By addressing her reader with such phrases as "As I have told you," (Yang, 1947:32) "You many have wondered why I often say," (Ibid., p. 122) "Have you ever noticed that life consists mostly of interruptions?" (Ibid., p. 164) or "would not you have done the same thing when the temptation was so handy?" (Ibid., p. 17) she creates an immediate presence of herself as an author and allows her reader to participate in this conversation of hers. More than once Yang Buwei notes that talking to others is what she does best. Her dialogic mode of narration can

therefore be viewed as a carefully chosen narrative device. And since talking is what she thinks she does best, her strategy really works, making her autobiography a convincing and credible read.

There are several themes that Yang Buwei thoroughly develops throughout her autobiography – her connection with the male world by being brought up as a boy, her education and profession, her being revolutionary, her being a professor's wife, her travels, her acting as a cultural interpreter for the Western reader. The following will examine these themes and evaluate the roles Yang Buwei adopted trying to establish her image as a woman, a typical Chinese woman and a person like no one else.

3.A Boy and a Girl, but First and Foremost – a Person

As mentioned above, Yang Buwei opens her autobiography with a part that she calls "Boyhood," which indicates her supposedly boyish upbringing (at least until she was about 10 years old). Adopted by her father's younger brother as a "son," Yang Buwei was even given a name "Ch'uanti, or Ch'uan'er, which means 'bring along a little brother,' a lucky name commonly given to a first born girl" (Yang, 1947:15). Thus, in spite of being born a girl, she was raised as a boy and called Little Master Three:

> to be called "Little Master Three" and to be dressed as "Little Master Three" also made me feel and behave as "Little Master Three." I was privileged to do things which none of my sisters or female cousins would dream of doing (Yang, 1947:32).

This also meant a conscious decision on the part of the adults not to make her go through foot-binding, which made her mother-in-law quite unhappy:

> A vitally important part of my male attire was that I never had my feet bound. Foot-binding was relatively less universal in the lower Yangtze valley, where women often had to work in ankle-deep water in the rice fields. But for a family of our standing, it took a revolutionary like my grandfather to connive at failure to observe foot-binding. My father, feeling that he was adopting a "son," was also willing to let my feet go where they wanted (Yang, 1947:33).

Here Yang Buwei in the same manner as Chen Hengzhe demonstrates just how forward-thinking and revolutionary her grandfather was (later she declares him to have had the ultimate influence on her life). In Chen's autobiography it was her maternal uncle (Third Uncle) who was just as revolutionary and progressive as Yang's grandfather. A scholar herself, Chen was bound to include another male scholar, one of the greatest thinkers of the late Qing, Liang Qichao, who had had a tremendous influence on her intellectual development. That these women dedicated much space in

their narratives to such male figures points to their need for a male starting point, a solid fundament to which they could attach their own authority. Yang Buwei's grandfather is portrayed as revolutionary in his views on the female custom of footbinding. Associating herself with such a male role model she not only gains in her own authority but also provides an insight for her Western reader which breaks the stereotype that all Chinese women were crippled by bound feet. However, Grandfather's decision about her feet did not prevent Yang Buwei's Big Brother from mocking her. She recalls his taunting words:

> Boy of a girl,
>
> With great big feet,
>
> With face unwashed,
>
> She goes outdoors for things to eat,
>
> And coming home,
>
> She argues and debates with heat (Yang, 1947:34).

Although Yang Buwei jokingly notes that her life as a boy "reached full manhood" when she together with the other men of the family, went pleasure-boating in a company of singsong girls (Yang in the company of her "own" singsong girl!), it was probably most formative for her perception of herself as boy that she was allowed to speak freely and boldly to her elders. This feature, tolerated and even encouraged by the male members of her family (Grandfather and the adoptive Father), made her personality, as she later would describe it, loud and outspoken, instead of timid and reserved as traditionally prescribed for a woman in the roles of an obedient daughter, good mother and a virtuous wife. Of the three women autobiographers discussed in this dissertation Yang is the only one who seems to have escaped the constraints of old-fashioned moral etiquette – both Chen Hengzhe and Ling Shuhua describe their early upbringing as if inspired by Ban Zhao's *Lessons*. It is no surprise thus that Yang defines the "loudness" of her personality as an exclusively male quality which she does not hesitate to reinforce every time she has to legitimize herself playing a male role.

This association with the male sex accompanied Yang Buwei throughout her whole life as she often was complimented for not being like a woman (Yang, 1947:5). Indeed, her commentaries such as "I feel as natural in the company of men as in the company of women, if not more so" (Yang, 1947:32), or "I have a habit of playing rough and ready as a gentleman and the privilege of being treated by gentlemen as a lady" (Yang, 1947:217) prove that she felt very comfortable in the

male role and could freely choose between male and female roles as befit a given situation. It is especially obvious in Yang's description of the times of calamities: "Possibly because of my early years of wearing a boy's attire and being called 'Little Master Three,' I always automatically assumed the part of man whenever there was an emergency" (Yang, 1947:100). Thus, taking refuge in Shanghai when the Revolution of 1911 broke out in her hometown, Yang Buwei's response to her friend's request to spend some more time with the underground revolutionaries was as follows: "I told her that since Father had not come out with us, I had to take care of the women folk of the family" (Yang, 1947:100). When a new disaster came to China together with the Japanese attack on Nanjing in 1937, it was again Yang Buwei who acted as the head of the family and made sure that her family made it safely out of the city (Yang, 1947:266-272). Perhaps it made much sense to Yang Buwei that it was her male attire that she had acquired since childhood that empowered her and gave her the right to act as a man. However, when women put a heroic hat on at times of calamities, it does not necessarily have anything to do with their being brought up as a boy. One of the most heroic female images in Chinese literature, Hua Mulan, stepped up and took an active hero position when she decided to go to war in male clothes to save her aging father and a far too young brother from sure death. The story does not bear evidence that her behavior was inspired by being brought up as a boy.[130] I would argue that it is the times of calamities that often open a space for heroic female behavior which otherwise lies dormant. In other words, women need the right opportunity or stimulus for acting outside the domain prescribed to them.[131] It is obvious that Yang Buwei happened to live at a time when such opportunities were numerous.

Yang Buwei shares the tendency to self-description as a boy with many Chinese women writers. Bing Xin in her autobiographical sketches tells of her male nickname, her wearing boy's clothes since very little and never wearing ear-rings (Bing Xin, 2001:165). Ling Shuhua mentions her boyish artistic qualities, Chen Hengzhe notes how she was compared to a boy in her childhood, because of her unusual wit.[132]

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[130] The legend about Hua Mulan underwent multiple changes and was continuously shaped and reshaped to suit the dominant discourse of a particular historical period. For an excellent analysis of the diversity of Hua Mulan images during different historical eras, see Edwards (2010).

[131] Women's tendency to take a heroic action in times of calamities is highlighted in Chen Hengzhe's *History of the West* (1928) where she included images of revolutionary women who assumed male roles in order to save the nation or fight for liberty. For the close reading of Chen's position on women's issues and their role in society, see Gimpel (2015:117-21).

[132] Elisabeth Croll explores the reasons why Chinese girls' found themselves playing boys (male) roles in the family on a temporary basis. For more detail, see Croll (1995:38-40).

Somehow all these women felt the necessity to stress their close connection to the male sex from their childhood years. As if creating this kind of connection to the male world was necessary to prove their right to make an exemplary person of themselves in an autobiography. Adopting a narrative strategy that highlighted their connection to the male world, these authors constructed positive and empowering images of Chinese femininity which was typically looked at in negative terms through the Western stereotypical gaze and held back by Chinese tradition. These powerful and authoritative images were constructed through such vocabulary as the nicknames they as girls had during childhood, as Yang Buwei's "Little Master Three"; or through personal qualities like Chen Hengzhe's adventurousness and ambition and Ling Shuhua's talent for painting. And, most important, self-authority in these women's autobiographies is manifested through their close connection to the formative male center pillars. These elders, Yang Buwei's grandfather, Chen Hengzhe's uncle and Ling Shuhua's teacher and father, let the girls go to public schools, let their feet be unbound, support their decision to break their engagements and encourage cultivation of their talents.

4.An Educated Woman

One of the central themes in every female autobiography is that of education.[133] Yang Buwei's narrative is no exception. Although she does not make as much fuss about being educated as Chen Hengzhe, it is clear that education had allowed Yang Buwei to become her own master, even to the point that, when her father died, she felt that being the "the eldest son" (Yang, 1947:155) in the family and having acquired the profession of medical doctor, she had to be the one to support her mother, younger brother and his wife! (Ibid., p. 154).

Yang Buwei's way to education is not like Chen Hengzhe's hunger for it or Ling Shuhua's timid curiosity about it.[134] Yang simply tells that in her family there was a tradition of home-

[133] Besides the autobiographies discussed in this thesis which confirm the centrality of education in women's lives, other female autobiographers such as Xie Bingying or Lu Yin demonstrate how Chinese women of the early twentieth century realized the essentiality of education for their future. See Xie (2009) and Lu (2011).

[134] For further comparison, see Xie Bingying's autobiography where her path towards education is described as a bitter fight with her mother who did not think her daughter needed to go to school (Xie, 2009:58-70) and Lu Yin's autobiography where her early education is compared to a punishment because she was locked up by her aunt in a room where she had to memorize her lesson by heart all alone while her older brothers were having fun playing outside (Lu, 2011:9).

schooling where both boys and girls started to get training in the classics from the age of five and were taught together until twelve. At this age it was proper for girls to start learning less academic subjects in the interior courtyards (Yang, 1947:27).

Thus, the first reader she became acquainted with was *Three Word Classic (Sanzi jing* 三字经),[135]"a thirteenth century rhymed reader for children, starting with human nature being good and going on through an outline of Chinese history to everything else about the world" (Yang, 1947:27). This book was supplemented by a *Women's Classic (Nü'er jing* 女儿经*),*[136] which she had to read, because in spite of the "male attire" she was a girl after all. Thoroughly hated by Yang Buwei for "its chief theme […] to make a woman know her place of unimportance" and because this book was "of no recognized standing" it did not remain long on her reading list. This statement demonstrates Yang's rejection of traditional images assigned for women. Among other texts that she did continue studying: "*The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, Confucius' *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Book of Odes*, parts of *Tso's Chronicles*, *Three Hundred Poems of the T'angs*, some of the T'ang essays, and, from hearing my big sisters reading aloud, snatches of the Diamond Sutra and other Buddhist scriptures" (Yang, 1947:31).[137]

However modern and unorthodox her behavior would become as she grew up, it seems that Yang Buwei was very conscious of using her knowledge of the classics when making her argument for changing the mourning ritual for her deceased mother. At that point she was establishing her medical practice and could not afford a forty-nine day long stay at home behind the mourning curtains as tradition prescribed. Therefore, while making a speech for the relatives to support the decision about changes, she recollects that she quoted such passages from the classics as would

[135]*Three Word Classic* (literally, three characters per line classic) served as "the single most popular primer" for Chinese children from the thirteenth to the twentieth century. The main emphasis of this primer is "on moral (Confucian) education, rather than simple rote learning of useful characters. It also contains a summary of the orthodox view of Chinese history memorized by every Chinese child for more than 700 years." For more, see Wilkinson (2013:295).

[136] *Women's Classic* was "a popular girl's primer of the late Ming, early Qing in three-syllable doggerel verse" (Wilkinson, 2013:177).

[137] The Classical books that Yang mentions here are those which typically were used for teaching male children. The first four books belong to the *Sishu* 四书 (*Four Books*) and constitute the core of the Confucian canon since the Western Han dynasty (206 BC – 9 AD). See Wilkinson (2013) for further reference (the English titles as in Yang (1947): *The Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大学), p. 371; *The Doctrine of Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸), p.371; Confucius' *Analects* (*Lunyu* 论语), p.371; *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子), p. 371; *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 诗经), p. 370; parts of *Tso's Chronicles* (*Zuozhuan* 左传), p. 372. *Three Hundred Poems of the T'angs* (*Tangshi sanbai shou* 唐诗三百首), p.401-3; Diamond Sutra (*Jingangjing* 金刚经), p. 910.

work in her favor: "you could of course prove anything if you knew your classics well enough" (Yang, 1947:163).

If knowing classics proved to be very helpful at times of confrontation with traditional practices, it was fiction that provided female types that people widely used to compare women with. This conclusion is drawn from the way Yang herself and her relatives draw parallels and compare Yang's personal traits to the characters from the famous Qing novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*.[138] Hence, after the episode when Yang Buwei delivered a grand speech in favor of changing mourning procedure, the relatives and friends who were present took her proposal positively and said that "after all Miss Three was a straightforward person of straightforward words, like T'anch'un [Jia Tanchun] in *Dream of the Red Chamber*" (Yang, 1947:163). The character of Jia Tanchun 贾探春 is a very clever and capable person but also brash and extremely outspoken.[139] These qualities that Yang Buwei's family members recognize as similar to Jia Tanchun's are obviously something they respect her for. Yang's strategy in using the *Dream of the Red Chamber* as a source of female images, including her own, suggests not only the degree of popularity this book still enjoyed among the Chinese at the beginning of the twentieth century but also her confidence that the Western reader might also be aware of this book and its rich female character range.

Yang Buwei mentions that, besides learning classical texts by heart, she was also permitted "to read 'idle books,' as novels were then called, but they were not considered educative – all right for womenfolk" (Yang, 1947:31). One such idle book was mentioned by Chen Hengzhe when she recalled herself reading *La Dame aux Camelias* for amusement (Chen, 1935:98). Although Yang Buwei does not mention titles like *La Dame aux Camelias* and does not specify which "idle books" she had read during her childhood, judging by the number of times *Dream of the Red Chamber* is mentioned in her autobiography, it is safe to suggest that this book was one of them. If Yang Buwei herself is compared to a female character who is brash and extremely outspoken, her fellow doctor companion Yiwu resembles more the traditional elegant lady Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 of the same novel. Yang Buwei portrays her as being frail and weak and sick in bed once every two or three days

[138] *Dream of the Red Chamber*, authored by Cao Xueqin, is one of China's *Four Great Classical Novels* (See Chapter 2). As an 80 chapter version it was first known under the title *The Story of a Stone* (*Shitou ji* 石头记). In 1792 it was published in an enlarged version containing 120 chapters. For further reference, see Wilkinson (2013:414). For a comprehensive study, see Edwards (1994).
[139] For further information on this character, see Zhou (1995:402).

(Yang, 1947:172).[140] Hence, when Yang needs to highlight the ideal roles such as filial daughter or son, she derives them from the classics, whereas she turns to fiction in search of descriptive details of personality qualities. It is also remarkable, that Hu Shi, being one of the only two witnesses at Yang Buwei and Zhao Yuanren's wedding, brought a volume of *Dream of the Red Chamber* (with his own commentaries to it) as a wedding gift![141] Yang's persistence in using this title suggests that she was very fond of this book and considered it significant for her own narrative. Perhaps, she felt a connection between her autobiographical narrative and a story that was considered to be based largely on the autobiographical experience of its author Cao Xuecai.[142]

Having received the initial schooling at home, as many girls of her standing, Yang Buwei entered a school for girls as soon as one was opened in Nanjing 1905.[143] Founded by "the governor of Kiangsu, Anhui, and Kiangsi" (Yang, 1947:63) Zhou Yushan, who was coerced into this endeavor by Yang's Grandfather, this establishment was known as Lüning School. The entrance examination was an assignment to write a composition with the title "The Importance of Education for Women."

> Like everybody else, I started the enumeration of such eternal truths as "The women of today are the mothers of the future people of the country." After putting down this sentence, I kept biting the upper end of my writing brush and blaming myself for not having listened to Father's advice to study hard and practice my calligraphy. After an indecisive struggle, I produced an essay of a hundred-odd words (Yang, 1947:64).[144]

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[140]For further information on this character, see Zhou (1995:530).

[141] Yang cites Hu Shi who, suspecting the real reason for the invitation for a dinner with Zhao Yuanren and Miss Yang decided to go prepared: "Just to be prepared, I got out a copy of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, an edition containing my commentaries, and had it gift-wrapped. But in case I guessed wrong, I had it wrapped in plain paper outside" (Yang, 1947:193).

[142] It was Hu Shi who first adopted the autobiographical approach to *Dream of the Red Chamber*, see Hsia (1968:247) and Edwards (1994:26-30).

[143] Although first missionary schools for girls were established from mid-nineteenth century (first one in 1844 in Ningbo, see Bailey (2007:12)), the first privately funded Chinese schools for girls did not appear until 1902. It was first in 1907 that the Qing government formally approved official public schools for girls and young women (Bailey, 2007:1).

[144] The eternal truths that Yang refers to were formulated by the elite reformers of the end of the Qing dynasty such as Kang Youwei, Tan Sitong, Liang Qichao Tan who advocated Chinese women's education which would serve nationalistic purposes. Liang argued that female literacy "would allow women to undertake productive work and to pursue professional careers. Furthermore, knowledgeable mothers could also better educate their sons and thus strengthen the entire nation" (Larson, 1998:26). Thus, among the widely used slogans were 'a worthy wife and good mother' (*xianqi liangmu*), a Japanese borrowed expression which implied that female education would provide "the cultivation of virtuous wives and mothers so that China in the future would have patriotic and knowledgeable sons" (Bailey, 2007:60); also, "studying to save the country and thereby reviving China" (*dushu jiuguo, zhenxing Zhonghua*) (Ibid., p.1).

Both the title of the composition and the "eternal truths" demonstrate the centrality of the topic of female education at the turn of the century[145] and at the same time the inability of the young girls to reflect on education's role in their life otherwise than by stating the male-defined "eternal truths".

While Chen Hengzhe made a good deal of fuss about herself being the first girl in the family to have ever entered a public school (around 1909), which illustrates her almost desperate attempt to create an image of a pioneer among female scholars, Yang Buwei mentions the same as a matter of fact. The enthusiasm and excitement about this development is expressed through the attitude of the Big Sister toward the occasion: "Big Sister was very anxious that I should be the first person in our family to enter a modern school" (Yang, 1947:63). However unique this occasion might seem, there must have been many well-to-do families of that time that had used an opportunity to send their daughters to modern schools.[146] The only objection that Yang Buwei's father had had was her entering a missionary school: "If China opens modern schools for girls," Father replied, "I shall send you to one, but not to missionary schools. Nobody of good family goes to a missionary school" (Yang, 1947:62). Such an utterance on the part of Yang Buwei's father subtly tells a foreign reader about the wealthy Chinese's resilient attitude towards missionaries in China and the schools that they were establishing there.[147] However, the future held many unforeseen turns, and Yang Buwei, after two years of study at Lüning school, would enter missionary McTyeire School in Shanghai.[148] Despite Yang's father's reservation towards missionary schools, Yang Buwei ensured support from her Grandfather in the matter of shifting school. She expected it to be even better than Lüning (Yang, 1947:75). McTeiyre was indeed quite famous and was known for attracting Chinese girls from wealthy families, who were willing to pay high tuition fees for their daughters' education there (Bailey, 2007:13).[149]

During her two-year study at Lüning school Yang received an offer to go to America on a Boxer Indemnity-fund scholarship. This fund was established with the indemnity money that China

[145] One of the most active promoters of education for women was Liang Qichao. See his article Lun nüxue 论女学 [On women's education], Liang (1960). For research on women's education, see Liu (2009b), Bailey (2007), Wong (1995).
[146] Wang Zheng notes that "it is no surprise that the elite should take the lead in sending their daughters to public school: the modern discourse on female education was created by leading members of the Qing intellectual elite such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, and that discourse targeted the social elite" (Wang,1999:207). On the debate among Chinese educators and officials on the benefits and drawbacks of female education, see Bailey (2001).
[147] On the discussion of the Chinese gentry's rejection and the resilient attitude towards missionaries and Christianity, see Deeks (2008).
[148] The Shanghai McTeiyre School for Girls was founded by Southern Methodist missionaries in 1892. For a discussion of this school see, for example, Bailey (2007:13).
[149] For more research on this school, see Ross (1996).

was to pay to the eight nations involved in the suppression of the 1900 Boxer Rebellion. Since it was found out that the amount of money paid to the U.S. was considerably greater than necessary, it was decided that the excess amount would be returned to China and used for sending Chinese students to study in America (Yang, 1947:66).[150] Having explained where the money in that fund came from Yang elaborates:

> For the first two years (1909 and 1910), before a preparatory school was established, students to be sent abroad were selected by competitive examinations open to the whole country. Since, however, girls had not had the same opportunity to go to modern schools to compete with the boys on an equal footing, they were selected without examination from various schools, priority being given to schools run by the Chinese. Six girls were chosen, and among them were the top three girls from our school, Lin Kuanhung, Ts'ai Suchüan, and myself" (Yang, 1947:67).

Thus, Yang Buwei claims that being a girl, she did not even have to take an examination to receive an opportunity to go abroad to study. This claim is in disagreement with Chen Hengzhe's description of herself taking several quite challenging exams in 1914 in order to go to America on an Indemnity-fund scholarship and making such an issue of it. Besides physical examination and English, she tells of having to pass examinations in subjects that she had never studied before: "English History, American History, Geometry, Higher Algebra, and so on" (Chen, 1935:181). Having spent a whole week taking exams "having three subjects in the morning, and two in the afternoon" (Ibid., p.183) she returned home to wait for the result. Moreover, Chen is painfully aware of her insufficient English, especially compared to those girls' who had attended the mission schools (Ibid., p.181). This fact, however, does not stop her from taking the examination. As for Yang, she narrates that it was exactly due to her poor knowledge of English that she decided to postpone the studies abroad. And although she wanted to go, she listened to her Grandfather's advice to wait: "Grandfather said that it was no use going to a country without a knowledge of the language and that I could wait a year or two, as there would be scholarships every year starting from 1909" (Yang, 1947:67). The discrepancies between Yang's and Chen's narratives in terms of the dates and the requirements in terms of exams might be due to the memory tricks or the intentional adjustment of the events. While I cannot verify Yang Buwei's statement, Chen Hengzhe's participation in the examinations has been recorded in the research of Chinese scholars (Shi, 2010:30).

[150] For a discussion of the Sino-American negotiations concerning the Boxer-Indemnity Fund's money, see Hunt (1972).

Hence, Yang continued her education at Lüning school where school life is described as very happy in comparison to the later one in McTyeire School. Besides studying Chinese, English and mathematics, she played tennis together with her girlfriends and their brothers, fished from the pond, took photographs and developed them, played chess and listened to music played on a phonograph (Yang, 1947:68).

> Those were the happiest school days I ever had, not because I am looking back from this distance through a time-filter, but because I told myself I was happy and everybody else told me so. I was successful in my studies, I had friends to play with. I was pampered by friends and family in every way. I thought nobody in any school, nobody in the world, could be as happy as I (Yang, 1947:69).

This description demonstrates how much happiness a modern type of schooling could bring into a child's life. However, the experiences with public schooling could also go the other way around. Lüning school stands in sharp contrast to Chen Hengzhe's experiences at medical school in Shanghai. Also Yang Buwei is disappointed with the other school (McTeiyre) she had a chance to go to. Compared to the warm and vivid description of her studies at Lüning school, she only very briefly mentions that she had expected McTeiyre to be a better school than the previous one. Her expectations had proven wrong – she found the instruction too stereotypical and the rules and regulations conservative.[151]

After the revolution of 1911, Yang Buwei briefly worked as a school principal, an occupation that brought her a title "Yang Xiansheng" (Yang, 1947:111). Although any professional woman was entitled to being called by this term, a *xiansheng* was first and foremost a term of address for all men (Ibid., p111). This title undoubtedly added to Yang's feeling of self-importance and a sense of belonging to the male world. She took this job, however, in order to earn a scholarship to go to England to pursue studies in medicine. The events of 1913, which she called a Second Revolution (Yang, 1947:129), changed those plans and Yang Buwei, instead of going to England, found herself in Japan where she studied for five years in Tokyo Women's Medical School (1914-1919). She came home a trained obstetrician (although it was not the field she had wanted to specialize in) and opened a hospital in Beijing together with a fellow graduate student. A

[151] Although Paul Bailey argues that Chinese women's "autobiographical fiction and memoirs" do little justice in giving an idea about what public education meant for girls at the turn of the 20th century (Bailey, 2007:9), the descriptions of Yang Buwei's and Chen Hengzhe's school life do provide information about their experiences at the girls' schools, about school curriculum, teachers and leisure time after classes. As for the impact of such education, Chen Hengzhe's exclamation speaks for itself: "(…) none of us had any idea as to what a modern school ought to be like, so we accepted every arrangement that this school made for us, from curriculum to the wearing of clothing. It was not until many years later that I realized that we had been the victims both of the new educational institutions in China which were only in their infantile stage, and of an inadequately prepared teacher and leader (Chen, 1935:107).

professional woman at last, she reflects with pride on herself and her friend being "among the earliest, if not the earliest, non-missionary woman doctors to set up practice on [their] own" (Yang, 1947:159). Thus the long road of education had born fruit and resulted in a profession which not only could support herself and her relatives, but added to her self-image as an independent woman doctor.

This professional achievement also proved her worth to her parents, since any person secretly wants one's parents to be proud of him/her. Even prior to Yang Buwei's final examination, during her vacation in China at her father's house she recollects how he had spoiled her, buying her numerous dresses and treating her to all her favorite foods: "He arranged parties for me and introduced me to everybody as "my daughter Dr. Yang Buwei." An obviously very proud father, he added:

> "You know," he told his guests, as he drank to their health, "I would rather have one daughter than ten sons. Now look at Yüsheng [Buwei's younger brother, also adopted child]. I don't know what's going to become of you, Yüsheng, if you keep on being such a truant. You know what, Ch'uan'er, I want you to take Yüsheng with you to enter a middle school in Japan next autumn and make a man of him – like yourself" (Yang, 1947:145).

In a matter of just two sentences, Yang Buwei's father not only recognizes her as a daughter who is worth ten sons but recognizes that she had made a "man" of herself, a role model for her younger brother. It is clear, then, that through education a woman gets a pass to enter a male world and is regarded as a person of achievement.

Although soon after a promising start to her career she had to abandon her profession for the less glorious role of a wife and a mother, Yang Buwei was very conscious of this decision and its consequences for her career. She never practiced medicine again as a licensed doctor, but she did use her knowledge of medicine, occasionally finding herself in situations where her medical skills were valuable in treating both her family members, friends, neighbors and colleagues. Furthermore she taught a course on anatomy and physiology at the Women's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences of the National Peiping University around 1930 (Yang, 1947:246) and established a Birth Control Clinic in Peiping (Ibid., p.228). And although such small input might seem a mockery to the remnants of her professional life, in her autobiography Yang Buwei showed a way to deal with the loss of a profession and a way to combine her professional knowledge with her role of wife and mother (these issues will be dealt in more detail later).

Such a turn of events might be viewed as a fiasco by other women who wanted to keep the mask of professionalism no matter what. It is very plausible that Chen Hengzhe, for instance, finished off her autobiography with a promising picture of future victories on the educational battlefield in order to hide the fact that she also had to abandon her career and become a wife and a mother.[152] These womanly roles that any typical Chinese woman sooner or later would have to play were left out by Chen Hengzhe as irrelevant to the male image of a scholar that she was trying to construct. However, in Yang Buwei's case it was not necessary, as she portrayed her personality as so innately male that even when she assumes the roles of wife and mother she is still the one who "has the trousers on." An image of a young revolutionist which can roughly be equaled with the role of a warrior in Pearson and Pope's terms, only reinforces her male qualities illustrating the male responsibilities she had to take during the uneasy times of the revolution.

5.The Young Revolutionist

Yang Buwei describes herself as a "young revolutionist" from the early chapters of her autobiography thus establishing her role as a "Warrior." Since she was quite little, she had witnessed very controversial conversations between the elder members of her family. In her words, her grandfather "was not much of a loyal subject of the Ch'ing dynasty" (Yang, 1947:36) which was why he avoided official life. Having lived several years in England, he had developed strong ideas about China's future and influenced his sons and Yang Buwei with his radical views. This was the reason for their family to get mixed up with revolutionists. She narrates how Big Uncle (in fact her biological father) had been arrested because of his association with Tan Sitong, the well-known reformist of the late Qing dynasty. Tan had previously been her grandfather's pupil in Buddhism and became a friend of their family. While the grownups faced real dangers because of their affiliation with radical thinkers, for Yang Buwei being a revolutionist at seven years of age meant making a list of things that she would do when she became of age:

> Such as: stay up as late as I wanted to, swing on a lattice door, quit practicing calligraphy, go out where I wanted to and return when I wanted to, and – let me see – and why not break my engagement with Cousin Ch'eng and marry whom I wanted to? So that was put down on my schedule (Yang, 1947:38).

Whether she fulfilled all of the "revolutionary" wishes of her childhood, she does not mention. However, the wish to break off her engagement was serious enough and quite revolutionary at the

[152] For the assessment of Chen Hengzhe's professional and personal priorities, see Gimpel (2015:23-28).

time. Yang Buwei gratefully recollects her grandfather's support in this controversial decision. Indeed, she calls him the person who had had the most formative influence on her life and gives him the honor of spoiling her "in habits of independence of thought and freedom of action" (Yang, 1947:89). Being a Buddhist did not prevent him from being a revolutionist and, as she appreciatively calls him, "a champion of freedom in general and of my freedom in particular" (Yang, 1947:82). Therefore on the objections of her father and the prospective mother-in-law he reasoned: "I have seen too many abuses in the old system. If a family like ours cannot make a start in reform, who else's can?" (Ibid., p. 81).

A liberal-minded grandfather who acquired his ideas of gender equality and women's education while serving as a Councillor in the Chinese Legation in London let his sons become exposed to the same ideas when he took them abroad with him. During his first stay abroad he took Yang Buwei's biological father with him to serve as attaché (Yang, 1947:86). On his second visit abroad he took Yang's adoptive father with him. During this stay they represented China at the Paris World Exhibition in 1889 (Ibid., p. 87-88). Having been exposed to the liberalism of Western thought, they more readily accepted the unorthodox behavior of their own children. This resulted in their own sons' revolutionary act of cutting off their queues on the eve of the 1911 Revolution, which presented them with the potential danger of execution.[153]

Being a member of such a revolutionary family and having acquired very male habits of "independence of thought and freedom of action" (Yang, 1947:89)Yang Buwei would not stop her revolutionary behavior at breaking off her engagement. She would do exactly what she had decided in her early childhood and choose her husband herself. More than that, she would even carry out quite a revolutionary act of "no-wedding." Neither herself nor her husband-to-be wished a traditional Chinese wedding for themselves. Therefore working on their idea to combine simplicity with originality they invited two friends (one of them Hu Shi) for an informal supper (Yang, 1947:192-3).

A curious detail about this arrangement is that Ren Hongjun (Zhao Yuanren's schoolmate from Cornell), who had himself just married Chen Hengzhe, offered his advice and support to the new couple. Considering himself and his wife new-thinking people and therefore leaders of the new

[153] On the removal of the "queue" as one of the symbols for the fall of imperial rule, see Godley (1994).

generation, Ren Hongjun urged Zhao Yuanren to follow in their footsteps and observe the minimal legal requirements about his no wedding.

> All we needed to do to satisfy the law was to have at least two witnesses and a paper, in any form, with a fifty-cent stamp-tax on it. That was all that would be necessary. He [Ren Hongjun] had no doubt of our taking things seriously. But in order not to lead irresponsible young people into being more irresponsible, he advised us to be more self-conscious about being leaders of the new generation (Yang, 1947:191).

Young revolutionaries, new-thinking modern people, these men and women considered themselves as role models for the younger generations. And if men thought they were entitled to this role, women acted as if they had deserved it. They made close affiliations with the male gender through their relationships with men in their families, they acquired education and they actively thought of the ways to break with tradition together with their revolutionary husbands.

6.A *Professor's* Wife or a Professor's *Wife*?

Yang Buwei's reflection on how she came to terms with her new role as a wife must be something that many professional Chinese women of her time could relate to. Among the autobiographers considered in this thesis, Yang Buwei is the only one who had had enough courage to take this topic up for discussion. Indeed, these women, who were so devoted to their goals of becoming professionals, independent of their families and role models for the younger generations, must have felt it as a hard blow to their self-perception having to abandon everything they had worked so hard for.

While Chen Hengzhe and Ling Shughua prefer not to even mention this part of their lives in their autobiographies, Yang Buwei reveals:

> When I plunged into marriage, I knew what I was in for and what I was getting out of (…) Although I was trying to be reconciled to the desertion of my profession, I did not expect that it would come so suddenly. I had hoped to be able to run the hospital for a while longer and put it in better shape (Yang, 1947:184).

Together with that, she exhibits very deep understanding that these things are inevitable for a woman if she also has aspirations about getting married and having children, thus releasing her biological potential as a woman. With this function new roles start playing a major part in a woman's life, at least for some time – the roles of wife and mother.

However, this does not have to mean abandoning a career for good. Times change, and if Yang Buwei's own career suffered a blow, modern times can allow a co-existence of both career

and marriage. She illustrates this with the example of her own daughter who was torn over "the perennial dilemma of marriage versus career"[154] but ended getting a job with her husband at the same university where they both could teach. Yang's comment on this is as if borrowed from a fairy tale: "There is every prospect that they will live and work happily ever afterwards" (Yang, 1947:183). Although such a happy coincidence does not necessarily happen for every young married couple, any woman can at least find consolation in following the general advice that Yang offers young women:

> Get as much education and training as you can find opportunities for. Try to find work in your line for a while before getting married. Marriage and family will make serious inroads and interruptions in your work, and that cuts down on the chance of a woman's getting to the highest degree of eminence in the professions, but that is not the same thing as saying that no married woman can attain eminence or that a married woman has to give up all her work for all time. No woman needs to be ashamed to have acquired a major interest in the development of the family. But in proportion to the largeness of interest and outlook she has acquired in her formative years, she will be able to make the growth of the family a help, instead of hindrance, to her own growth. By the time the children are out of her hands, she will find herself, not a back number in the larger society, but a prouder member of it (Yang, 1947:183).

These words of guidance read almost like Ban Zhao's *Lessons*, where she acted both as an instructor for her own daughters and for young women in general. Just as Ban Zhao, Yang Buwei takes the role of an "Educator" (because any mother is a teacher of her own children) and shares her wisdom with the younger generation. Compared to the uptight voice of Chen Hengzhe the "Educator," Yang, performing the role of an "Educator," is comforting and reassuring, which makes her a more likable and sympathetic author.

Although Yang Buwei nostalgically recalls her having to desert her profession and find herself in the role of wife and, soon after the "no wedding" ceremony, a mother, she, nevertheless, manages to maintain her own integrity and applies her enormous energy to the project of "running a family" instead of "running a hospital." Having received an absent-minded professor for a husband, Yang Buwei portrayed herself not as merely a wife who followed her husband's lead and followed him wherever he might get a job. Instead, her narrative depicts her as the person in charge who made sure that their fast growing family would withstand all the hardships on its way.

Thus on their first visit to America, Zhao Yuanren, a true academic, was more concerned about preparation for his new assignment – National Language Records - then giving enough

[154] Chen Hengzhe, who seems to suffer from the same dilemma, wrote a short story "Luoqisi's Problem" (Luoqisi de wenti 洛绮丝的问题) which reflects the common problem of the educated women of her time who had to choose between the roles of a career woman or a housewife. For the discussion of "Luoqisi's Problem," see Gimpel (2015:85-6).

lectures to earn a living. It was Yang Buwei who showed herself resourceful and started selling handbags and tea sets that she had made out of parts of Mandarin coats that she had brought with her from China (Yang, 1947:203). Having returned from their second trip to America in 1933 with a wish to settle down in a permanent home in Nanjing, it was Yang Buwei, who drew the plans for the new house (without any experience in architecture) and supervised its construction (Ibid, p. 259). It was her efforts alone that made it possible to save all her family and send them away from the war in 1937 (Ibid, pp. 266-272). In this manner she displays the male qualities of her personality, which seem to become even stronger with age, despite her role of wife.

Yang Buwei's demonstration of the two sided-nature of performing the role of wife, the one largely social when she accompanied her husband in public and the other one as attending to the family needs at home, can be paralleled with the *nei/wai* 内/外 dichotomy written down in the the Li Ji (*Book of Rites*).[155] According to the traditional doctrine of gender-based separation of spheres, women belonged to the "inside" *nei* while men were affiliated with the "outside" *wai*.[156] However, although Yang admits that there are times when she had to assume the more traditional role of a wife, she would not accept it as a permanent solution. Thus, the borders of the *nei*/*wai* dichotomy become looser and less fixed as Yang adjusts her role and position of a wife as it fits life situations she encounters herself in.

During all the years that she was married to Zhao Yuanren, Yang Buwei not only managed to provide care for her husband and her children at home, treating multiple influenzas, pneumonias and colds, but actively participated in public life as well. When Zhao Yuanren accepted a job offer from Beijing's Qinghua University in 1925, Yang Buwei found herself in a more privileged position of being a housewife in China. At liberty to hire servants and nannies for the children, she could now play the role of a socially active housewife, which she thoroughly enjoyed: "While the men were changing Tsing Hua into a more Chinese institution from the academic side, I took the cause of the Chinese ladies and tried to change the social life into that of a more Chinese community" (Yang, 1947:226). In this manner, while being a *professor's* wife she managed to organize a kindergarten and a primary school for children of the faculty members, started a restaurant (or a faculty kitchen) which became very popular with both students and faculty members

[155] For detailed information about *Li Ji* [*Book of Rites*], see Wilkinson (2013:698).

[156] The twelfth chapter of the *Li Ji* which is called the "Domestic Regulations" or *Nei ze* 内则, prescribes the rules for use of "inner and outer" space laying down the distinction between men and women from the very birth (Raphals, 1998:224). For the translation of the *Book of Rites*, see Legge (1885).

and even with people in the city who would frequently make take-out orders, and organized a bus line from the city to Qinghua (Yang, 1947:227-8). It is with a certain sense of pride that Yang Buwei notes how "the improved communications made it possible for me to set up in Peiping a Birth Control Clinic, to which I had given a good deal of thought while abroad" (Yang, 1947:228). Indeed, while abroad she had translated a book written by the most prominent advocate of birth control of that time – Margaret Sanger (1879-1966),[157] called *What Every Girl Should Know*, a title that is reminiscent of Ban Zhao's *Lessons for Women*. After being edited by Zhao Yuanren, Sanger's book was published in Chinese by the Commercial press in 1924 (Yang, 1947:210). Later, just before leaving for China, Yang Buwei even met Margaret Sanger and, after an interview with her, visited birth control clinics in New York (Yang, 1947:214).

These activities demonstrate how she, in spite of losing her profession, continuously worked with the idea of medicine in many different ways. Also, when describing herself as an unofficial doctor for the families of the faculty at Qinghua as well as a teacher of anatomy and physiology, as mentioned earlier, Yang Buwei illustrates how professional interests can be combined with the role of housewife.

The role of wife that Yang Buwei portrays in her narrative is very versatile and includes many other female roles and a number of male ones as well: she is also a mother, a leisure writer, a traveler, a nurse, an architect, a translator, a cook, to name just a few. While demonstrating how a wife can be more than just a housewife, Yang Buwei also shows more private and intimate sides of her wifely role. The way she narrates her mood and her inner thoughts while her husband is away on a field trip lets her reader see another side of marriage, a more romantic one:

> When you think of wives waiting for their husbands gone for war "for the duration," and, in unfortunate cases, forever, it ought to be nothing to wait for a husband on a field trip for two or three months. But you mind it just the same when it's your own husband (Yang, 1947:240).

A reader familiar with early Chinese female poetry, having read the above quotation will recognize a theme of a wife longing for her husband, waiting for his return. Having only poetry and the epistolary genre as a means of expression for their love and distress, early female poets would write love letters and poems for their loved ones.[158] Reflecting over those letters Yang Buwei exchanged with her husband, she complains over the restrictions of the epistolary genre as such: "Wonderful as love letters are, they are at best only substitutes for love" (Yang, 1947:241).

[157] On her biography, see Katz (2000).
[158] For an example of such love letters, see Kwei-li (1990).

Yang Buwei's image of a wife would not be complete without referring to the less romantic and socially attractive side of it. During the time when her family took refuge from the Japanese attacks on Nanjing, she realized that from being an absent-minded *professor's* wife, she all of a sudden found herself in a position of an absent-minded professor's *wife*. If the first term definitely has some prestige to it, including travels, shopping, social gatherings with the leading minds of Chinese and Western academia, the second notion is bringing her down to what had always been the basic duties of a woman, who herself became absent-minded and exhausted by the war and by having to take care of an illness- weakened husband besides her four children. Although Yang Buwei sees a distinct difference between these two wifely roles, there is a common notion to them – Yang's perception of herself through the prism of her professor of a husband. All her activities, all the roles that she might occasionally occupy after having married, co-exist with her role of wife. Yang Buwei does not seem to mind it at all. Instead, the honesty with which she reveals both the fashionable and more ordinary sides of being a wife makes her narrative even more likable.

Although Yang Buwei borrows heavily from male roles and masculine qualities, it is a woman and a typical Chinese woman that she wants to portray, an intention supported by the title *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman.* This statement is reinforced by the opening lines of her introductory first chapter "About Myself" where she in a very straightforward manner states that she is a typical Chinese woman. However, typical does not necessarily mean ordinary and submissive, which probably would be the first thing to come to mind to a Western reader. Here is what she perceives to be typical for a Chinese woman:

> I am a typical Chinese woman. I grew up in a big family of four generations living in the same house. I was taught to read and write at home. I learned later to cook and sew. I am married, as most other Chinese women are. I have much power in the family, but let my husband decide on the important things, which are few and far between. I have four children, a very typical number for a Chinese woman to have. I love my children, but hate outward shows of solicitude. I am very much attached to my relatives and friends and put personal loyalty high on my scale of values (Yang, 1947:3).

Yang's portrayal of a typical Chinese woman both confirms and rejects some of the stereotypical pictures about Chinese women in the West. It is obvious that when she thinks of herself in terms of being a Chinese woman she describes herself against her family and operates with the roles that women typically assume with the family – she is a mother and a wife who runs the household and takes care of her children. However, she is also a woman who has power in the family and knows how to use it wisely. This description goes against the stereotype of the submissive and obedient position of Chinese women in the family. She openly and proudly claims that she *lets* her husband decide on the important things demonstrating that it is her who really holds the position of power.

7.“Commuter”[159] between America and China

When Yang Buwei addressed her autobiography to a Western audience, she envisaged a very specific role for herself – the role of cultural interpreter. Her insufficient command of the English language is not perceived as a hindrance. She says: “Speaking broken English and reading very little English, I have become a popular consultant on things American for my Chinese friends and on things Chinese for my American friends” (Yang, 1947:3-4). A very peculiar feature of her “interpretation” is that she not only explains Chinese culture and traditions for the foreign reader, dismantles some of the stereotypes that the Western audience got accustomed to operating with when thinking of China, she also gives an insight into how Western culture is seen through the eyes of the native Chinese, who has her own stereotypes about the West. Thus constantly comparing the two polarities she looks for similarities, explains the differences and gradually builds a bridge of mutual understanding and appreciation of each other’s characteristic features. Or in Walter Fisher’s terms, she employs a narrative paradigm as a means of communicating trans-cultural messages about a shared reality (Fischer, 1984:8). Yang’s narrative becomes a transformative space that transports ideas and images “across communities as well as cultures, across time and place” (Ibid., p.8) where the participants gain knowledge and unique insight into the actions of others. To facilitate Sino-Western communication she occupies the role of a cultural ambassador acting as an ethnographer, a historian, a biographer, a travel companion. Compared to the academic and official approach to the role of cultural interpreter that Chen Hengzhe assumes in her autobiography, Yang’s incentive is to create an atmosphere of a friendly conversation, a dialogue, in Bakhtin’s terms. Yang, contrary to Chen, does not enter into judgmental evaluations of old traditional culture or offer didactic prescriptions of how people should behave. Instead, by interpreting cultural traits in a straightforward and sincere manner, she succeeds in becoming a consultant people seek advice from. Yang’s interpretative approach ensures her a position of authority which appears no less trustworthy or legitimate than Chen’s who positioned herself as a role model and fighter against the injustice of the old Chinese practices and customs.

Why would Americans bother to listen to her and accept her authority on the matter of cultural interpretation? Earlier it was discussed how she employed her close connection to the world of Chinese men to establish her own authority. However, to win the Western audience over, she

[159] Yang calls herself and her husband “commuters” between the continents due to their frequent travelling (Yang, 1947:255).

also needed to establish a close connection to the world of her readership. This connection is created masterfully when she lets her reader know how her husband to-be just at the beginning of their acquaintance compared her to an American when he one day saw her knitting in her spare time: "You are just like an American, Dr. Yang, always doing something. You never seem to need a rest" (Yang, 1947:171). Not only is she compared to an American, the compliment comes from a man who was an American-returned student and supposedly knew what he was talking about! Yang's obvious connection to Lin Yutang and Pearl S. Buck also plays a role in accrediting her as a person Americans should listen to.

As "almost an American" because of her natural talent to resemble them and because of her extensive travels around America, Yang Buwei in her narrative also adopts some of the images about China that American society operated with. Among those are the images of corporal punishment (Yang, 1947:18) which came to the West with photographs of the punished bodies or written descriptions of performances of tormented execution;[160] the images of gambling (Ibid., p.18), humiliating traditions of kowtow (Ibid., p. 29) and the subjective practice of binding of women's feet (Ibid., p.33). Hence, Yang Buwei demonstrates how she herself had observed the scenes of corporal punishment, which fits the American notion of the "grim sides of life" in China. She recalls how as a child she would sit on the servant's shoulders and witness a scene of corporal punishment. This story is almost a word-for-word depiction of a similar situation in Ling Shuhua's autobiography which I address in Chapter Five.

> During the Empire, when an official held court to try criminals, corporal punishment was the usual thing. Important cases would come up to the provincial yamen. When I heard sounds of pleading and wailing, I would steer Huang Ma in the direction of the sound, and, in order to keep her hairdo intact, she usually obliged. From a vantage point off one side of the screen behind the governor's seat, I could see everything that was going on. I was told that they were bad men being spanked (Yang, 1947:18).

Another very widely held notion about the Chinese as gamblers is supported by Yang's description of the adults, women included, playing cards "probably the game of 'ten-points,' played with thin, long cards, with circles, bamboos, and characters, being the nineteenth-century version of modern mahjong" (Yang, 1947:18). Yang speaks also of the tradition of kowtow, known in the Western world from the humiliating experience of McCartney at the emperors' court in 1793.[161] However, she succeeds in dismantling the "disgraceful" side of it, showing it rather as a gesture that can

[160] For a vivid example of the tortures criminals were subjected to in China, see George Morrison's (1862-1920) description of the horrors he had witnessed during his travels in China (Morrison, 1895:103).
[161] See Gregory (2003:55-68).

restore a person's self-respect and maintain dignity. When Yang's home teacher was offended by the way he was reprimanded for a well-meant scolding of his pupils and wanted to leave, only a kowtow saved the situation. As Yang narrates: "a full kowtow (…) was enough to restore his [teacher's] self-respect, and so he was able to remain with dignity" (Yang, 1947:29). The stereotype of the Chinese woman with bound feet is also addressed, not so much to confirm it, as to show that in China there had been regional deviations in practicing the tradition, and some of the families, were so progressive in their thinking that they allowed their daughters' feet to remain unbound (her own included). Yet another stereotype of Chinese men taking multiple concubines is decisively dismissed. While not exactly denying that this practice existed, she demonstrated that men in her own family had to accept another path. Yang Buwei portrayed a powerful grandmother who had prohibited the men of the family to take concubines (Yang, 1947:11). It was then decided that if a wife could not give a man an heir, a nephew or a niece could be adopted for that purpose (Ibid., p.11). The images of this powerful grandmother who could decide on men's behalf within the family was definitely an inspirational source for Yang herself when she described herself as the one who made decisions in the family.

As an ethnographer, Yang Buwei offers a range of colorful and exotic images that would satisfy the foreign taste. Among those are descriptions of traditional feasting (Yang, 1947:18), performances (Ibid., pp.18-19), funerals (Ibid., pp.150-7 and pp.162-3) and weddings (Ibid., pp. 55-7). She takes time to describe the ritual colors that are proper to each event (such as white as a color of mourning and red as a color of happiness), the appropriate gifts and behavior for each occasion. However, such descriptions are so organically merged into the narrative that it does not read as an ethnographical study, but rather as little spicy details that season the narrative. If some traditions and practices are quickly mentioned, some others are given much more attention. Thus Yang Buwei dwells on two deeply rooted Chinese traditions of betrothal and adoption of children by childless parents as those were the ones that had affected her life personally.

She starts her narrative by explaining the intriguing fact that she had four parents – her birth parents, whom she had to call Big Uncle and Aunt, and her adoptive parents – Father and Mother. Adoption within the family, as mentioned above, was a common practice in China[162] and Yang Buwei could demonstrate the practicalities of such an approach with her own example (Yang, pp.9-

[162] For a study of kinship organization in late imperial China and especially of strategies of adoption and marriage arrangement, see Dennerline (1986).

10).[163] Also she shows her aversion towards the tradition of arranged marriages which were agreed upon by the parents sometimes even prior to the birth of their children. Much of her revolutionary image is built upon her struggle to break off this arrangement.

Attending to the well-recognized images of China, Yang Buwei adopts the point of view of an American, confirming some of the stereotypes that have become common when thinking about China in the West. However, as a typical Chinese she brings new perspectives to those stereotypes either dismantling them or showing them from a more human perspective. Her narrative thus presents a more nuanced picture of Chinese traditions and practices.

As a historian of China, Yang Buwei is quite brief, mentioning only quick historical facts that give a general idea of what happened in Chinese history in particular years. Although brief in historical details, she provides a close description of how those historical events had affected her family and herself personally. Under the revolution of 1911, when her brothers had cut off their queues, Yang narrates an extremely dangerous flight from home to Shanghai, with all the boys dressed as Buddhist nuns to hide their heads. During the events of what she called the Second Revolution of 1913, she has to come to terms with the fact that the promise of a scholarship to England was not going to be fulfilled and the plans had to be changed in favor of studying in Japan. A vivid description of the flight from Nanjing just as the Japanese launched their first attack and life as refugees in Changsha and Kunming portrays the horrors of war when the family had to deal with the devastating blow of the loss of everything they owned in Nanjing including their house and all their belongings.

> Then the sack of Nanking that shocked the world. True, most of my near relatives and friends had left. The national capital had moved to Chungking. Nobody had expected that Nanking could be defended. But it was my Nanking. The fact that Nanking was lost weighed so heavily on me that it absorbed most of the shock of the subsequent news that my Lanchia Chuang home had been burned to the ground (Yang, 1947:274).

The personal touch to such historical events makes history human and makes Yang Buwei a true historian of the personal. This approach makes Yang's narrative much more approachable and readable than Chen's who made history a matter of scholarship. Furthermore, what makes Yang's personal narrative unique is the way she makes it personal for her reader as well. By addressing her reader directly in the text Yang Buwei makes him/her a participant in her narrative actively involved in her own history: "You remember the 1900 Boxer uprising I spoke of, which resulted in the occupation of Peking by the armies of eight countries?" (Yang, 1947:66) or "On September 18,

[163] Also Ling Shuhua tells of herself being adopted by her father's good friends, see Chapter 5.

1931, as everybody knows, Japan marched on Mukden and took Manchuria" (Ibid., p. 249). Such a direct way of addressing her reader anticipates a response and once again brings forth Bakhtin's concept of dialogue in reflecting historical and cultural discourses that are familiar to both author and reader and can be negotiated through the narrative communication. The reader can also feel Yang Buwei's critical position on the events from the choice of her vocabulary, for example "occupation," "Japanese attack," Chinese cities "in peril."

If she acts as a historian when speaking of China, she takes a slightly different position when depicting the Western world. Instead of a historian she makes herself an eye-witness of some quite important historical events that had had major influence on the Western world. She gives her reader a first-hand account of how she experienced the Great Depression during her second stay in America. She obviously considers her experience unique:

> The Washington of that time was of course not the Washington of the early 'forties, where there was a shortage of everything except people. For I arrived there in the midst of the depression after the crisis of 1929, and, with fresh pork shoulder selling at nine cents a pound, you can see how little we salaried people appreciated the meaning of the word "depression" (Yang, 1947:252).

However, she was very soon to feel the solemn realities of the situation, for, as she expresses it: "One fine morning, I woke up to find myself penniless. So did everybody else in the household. I had been very rich on the previous Thursday" (Yang, 1947:252).

Also, her recollections about the news of the end of the war, which she and her family received while living on American soil, provide a personal tinge to what it felt like when a disaster that had affected the whole world came to an end:

> Four days later, as you know, was the false alarm about the surrender. When we heard the report, we tried to start a celebration. But houses were hundreds of yards apart and our yelling was not very impressive. Yuenren took a cowbell from the mantelpiece and rang it on the lawn as hard as he could. But one professor ringing a cowbell did not make a celebrating crowd (Yang, 1947:316).

When the news of the real surrender did come two days later, she notes that they celebrated it "in a slightly more sober manner" (Yang, 1947:316).

A cultural interpreter, Yang Buwei ensures that her narrative is replete with examples of her observations in terms of how different cultures function and affect each other. As she tells of her experiences as a housewife during her first stay in America, she is clearly forced to reconsider her ideas about this role. If a wife in China led an untroubled life without "any responsibilities for the

management and economy of the household" (Yang, 1947:203), filling the role of a wife in America turned out to be quite a different task:

> Now that I have traveled ten thousand miles to a New World, I found myself thinking more and more like the narrow-minded house-wife that I hitherto looked down upon. Pots and pans were among the first things I picked out from the counters of the "Five and Ten" (Yang, 1947:203).

She devotes some attention to how her role as a mother changed depending on whether she was in America or China. She thus observes: "As housekeeping with a baby was less of a job for me in Peiping than in Cambridge, I started soon to look for outside activities" (Yang, 1947:245). This remark stands in sharp contrast to the descriptions of herself and her husband taking care of their new-born baby in America, not having time to even wash the dishes. She recollects how her husband, during the time she spent at the hospital after she had given birth to their first child, collected three hundred dishes as an alternative to washing them. Caring for their child alone without the help of maids and servants proved to be a daunting task and the collection of plates became suddenly quite handy as in this way they "needed to wash dishes only once a week or even longer" (Yang, 1947:208).

While touring Europe in 1924-5, Yang Buwei had the opportunity to observe the differences in educational approaches in America, in Europe and in China and she notes:

> In America, students seem to play in high schools and study in college. The average college students are helped along and have to learn something before they can graduate, while the best students feel the restricting influence of regulations and requirements. In Europe, they study hard in high school, or rather the equivalent of the Japanese Junior College. When they enter a university, they do what they like and come out good for nothing or first-class scholars. The Chinese students who have studied in Europe and America seem to reflect the same conditions as the native students of those countries (Yang, 1947:220-221).

Yang's husband had originally been educated in America and, consequently, acquired his knowledge "the American way." However, it was obviously perceived as a great advantage to have the European style schooling as an addition to American schooling and therefore Zhao Yuanren's wish to get "glazed" (Yang, 1947:221) with the title of "European-returned" (Ibid,. p. 221) would add weight to his title of the American-returned.

In terms of her profession she also explores the differences of medical care and birth control in China and America. Thus during her first visit to an American hospital when she was giving birth to her first child, Yang Buwei had the chance to take a close up view at differences of patient care there:

> I feel very much tempted to dwell on comparison of medical practice in America and in China (new style), such as the readiness to use anesthesia and instrumental aid in America, and the conservatism of dietetic routine, each country in its own way (Yang, 1947:206).

Finding differences in some practices, Yang Buwei, the professionally trained woman, also shows that she has an attentive eye for the similarities. When visiting Birth Control clinics in New York just before Zhao Yuanren and herself were to leave America in 1924 she observes:

> I had noticed that in China, as in the West, birth control was practiced by the wrong end of the society. Those who had access to and made use of knowledge of contraception were mainly those who can and should bear the burden of bringing up large families. While I do not believe in any significant difference in inheritance between classes, the better-to-do certainly have better chances of educating their children. How could I reach the masses, for whom more children would mean only more slave labor? I carried this line of questioning with me for some time, until I tried some answers after I returned to Peiping (Yang, 1947:214).

It is clear, that not only is she aware of the similar problem that both America and China encountered, she still tries to position herself as a doctor, who as a professional constantly thinks of the well-being of potential patients.

As a traveler around the world, it comes, perhaps, as no surprise, that parts of Yang's narrative remind more of a travelogue than a standard autobiography. The extensive trips that she had made both within China and abroad (in Europe, America and Japan), give an impression of a life constantly on the move. Yang's daughter, Chao Rulan, confirms this impression saying in her autobiographical notes that "the whole family (my parents, myself and my three younger sisters) was constantly on the move" (Chao, 1995:1) which meant that the life with her parents was "not always easy" (Ibid., p.1). As a positive side to this nonstop migration, however, she admits that it was "full of excitement and fun" (Ibid., p.1). Travel is such an indistinguishable part of Yang Buwei's life that it certainly became part of her personality. Through travel she also received an opportunity to come to terms with the stereotypes that she herself had about the Western world. Thus while her commentary about Buckingham Palace in London sounds as a mockery: "I had thought that it was an old apartment house when I first approached Buckingham Palace from the side" (Yang, 1947:220), she reveals how her idea about Germany "simply as Germany" became more nuanced after her visiting the south of the country:

> My impression of arrogant Prussia, with its angry stone lions and colossal frowns of heroes, was softened down to human dimensions when I saw beautiful Nürnberg and friendly München. From my school geography, I had been thinking of Germany simply as Germany. But now I began to think of Bavaria as Bavaria (Yang, 1947:217).

Several times she notices how some situations, places and things that she encountered abroad look quite familiar. Thus, in San Francisco she has a feeling of almost déjà-vu at a restaurant:

> When we entered a restaurant and a headwaiter beckoned us to a table, I could swear that we had been there before. But where? I had never been to a restaurant in America. Then it dawned on me that it was the kind of scene I had seen many times in the movies (Yang, 1947:200).

Arriving in England, she was again surprised over the sudden familiarity of the places she saw:

> Another surprise was the familiarity of the scene at the dock and the railway stations. Certainly I had never been in England before, and I had not seen any British movies that I could remember. When I entered the train and got a whiff of that characteristic smell, then I began to remember. It was simply the prototype of the Shanghai-Nanking Railway, which had been built by the British with British equipment, painted with British paint (Yang, 1947:215).

With these examples she demonstrates how the Chinese also had certain ideas of the West, constructed and stereotyped either through education, movies or otherwise. She is not shy about demonstrating her own stereotypical views of Western realities and uses it as a way of showing, perhaps, that all people are prone to stereotyping things that they are not very familiar with. She illustrates that people's stereotypes about each other can be overcome by means of direct contact and open-minded cultural interaction.

If some chapters of her autobiography could be classified as a travelogue, there are a few other chapters that could certainly serve as a modern edition of the *Lonely Planet* series. Her description of the Chinese cities of Hangzhou and Suzhou are remarkable for the information about their history, famous sites, traditional food and affordable accommodation. Her remarks on Cantonese cooking brings an insight into how it was stereotyped in America as *the* kind of food that Chinese eat:

> After knowing Cantonese cooking at first hand, I realized how people had wronged the Cantonese by judging it by the quality of American chopsuey. The virtue of Cantonese cooking lies mainly in the right and simplest treatment of the best material, as contrasted with the use of elaborate seasoning of some other provinces. It was only in recent years that genuine Cantonese cooking found its way into a few restaurants in some of the larger American cities (Yang, 1947:240).

Whether it is Cantonese cuisine or simple family meals that Yang describes, she devotes much space in her autobiography to this occupation as it is one of the prime female tasks that can define one's performance as a woman. In Yang's case this could be either forty different kinds of dishes that she prepared for her father's mourning period to impress her relatives and earn the status of a filial daughter or it could also manifest itself in her cooking snacks for twenty people late at night when her husband and his colleagues came to a point when their intellectual hunger became non-intellectual. This could also be writing a book *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*, which Yang Buwei also addressed to Americans as well.

When Yang Buwei positioned herself as a woman, a typical Chinese woman and as a person with unique and charismatic character traits, she did so from the standpoint of a grown woman who had seen life and its manifestations. She portrayed herself as a commuter between the roles she had assumed during her lifetime and between the worlds that she moved between. Those roles that are both female as well as male, American as well as Chinese, are supported by the vocabulary she uses to describe herself in them. Thus she is loud and outspoken as a male, she is vain as a woman and caring as a mother, she is supportive and longing as a wife, she is industrious as an American and patriotic as a Chinese. The reader experiences her as a "filial" daughter and a son/boy; a revolutionary, both at home and in the society; a professional woman; a wife and a housewife; a mother (also as an educator); a woman taking on a man's role and playing a hero when necessary.

However, in spite of her attempts at being a hero, she remained a woman. When Pearson and Pope argued that women do not totally discard their traditional heroine roles even when acting as heroes, they assume that women *cannot* discard the female roles no matter how hard they try. In Yang Buwei's narrative we get a clear impression that, although she was proud to have been associated with hero roles, she *would not* give up the roles that also made her a woman. It is with a feeling of womanly pride that she concludes her narrative, arguing the importance of small and trivial things about her existence and accepting them.

> Though I was "Little Master Three" for the first twelve years of my life, and still show the effects of him, I have been a woman ever since I put on the dress of "Little Miss Three." As a woman I am very much concerned with the smaller things of life. I may not like some of them as well as some others. Kindly time will usually fraction-distill it into a richer reminiscence, but that does not make the forgotten parts any less really lived. So I will try not to conclude this autobiography with a "larger view of things." I will not try to think up conclusions on the meaning of life. I will go on telling my story of the day's work. I will go on talking about kitchen things and eyeglasses. I will gossip and complain. My Cambridge won't mind! (Yang, 1947:303).

These last words demonstrate the perspective of an experienced woman who does not need to establish her worth any longer. She has been around the world, she has tried it all and now has found her niche. In her old age, preoccupied with small things in life, she can sit back and reflect on her life, concluding that in spite of her youthful aspirations about education, profession, and revolutionary activities which required active male qualities, she is well content with being a woman. Yang Buwei had taken the wealth of roles available to her in her cross-cultural experience and blended them all to one that simply suited her. She was not defined by outside images; she defined herself.

Chapter Five

Ling Shuhua: Interpreting China as an Artist

1.Introduction

Apart from the many paintings and three collections of short stories in Chinese that Ling Shuhua left behind after her death,[164] there is also a memoir of her early life in English. Her autobiographical narrative *Ancient Melodies* was published by the Hogarth Press[165] in 1953 in England under the name Chen Su-hua Ling.[166] This narrative is the one published most recently if compared to the autobiographies that I approached in previous chapters. Like Chen Hengzhe and Yang Buwei, Ling was coaxed and coerced into writing a story of her life by her foreign friends. Therefore, as in the cases with the previous two autobiographies, Ling's narrative will be analyzed as an attempt to supply the Western reader with genuine images of China, its traditions and people formulated by an authentic Chinese.

Ancient Melodies is a monograph of slightly more than two hundred and fifty pages divided into eighteen chapters. In the absence of a preface where Ling Shuhua could have presented the intention and the purpose behind her narrative as Chen Hengzhe and Yang Buwei did with theirs, it is the introduction written by Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962)[167] that performs this function. In it, Sackville-West indicates that this book is a collection of memories and provides a few words about Ling's family background and some details about how this book came into being (Sackville-West, 1969:7-10). It was undoubtedly a clever move on the part of Ling Shuhua to have a well-known English author introduce her work for the readership in Britain – not only was it presented in

[164] These collections are: *Huazhishi* 花之诗 [Temple of Flowers], see Ling (1928); *Nüren* 女人 [Women], see Ling (1930a), and *Xiaohai* 小孩 [Children], see Ling (1930b). *Xiaohai* was republished later under the title *Xiao ge'er lia* 小哥儿俩 [Little Brothers], see Ling (1935).

[165] Hogarth Press was owned by Leonard Woolf (1880-1969), an English author, publisher and husband to Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), a modernist English writer and a central figure in the Bloomsbury Group. On their activities as publishers, see Willis (1992). On Leonard Woolf's life and writings, see Drabble (1986:1082-3), on Virginia Woolf, see Drabble (1986:1083-4).

[166] I will, however, use her maiden name Ling Shuhua when referring to her autobiography in order to avoid confusion of her surname "Chen" with Chen Hengzhe.

[167] Vita Sackville-West was an English poet and novelist known for her close relationship with Virginia Woolf. On Sackville-West's life and writings, see Drabble (1986:859).

praising terms; it furthermore established a connection between Ling and Virginia Woolf, one of the leading female writers of that era. The role of these British writers in the publishing of Ling's book and its reception in Britain will be dealt with in the next section.

Like Chen Hengzhe, Ling does not include any pictures of herself in her volume. However, she refines it with her hand-made drawings - almost every other chapter includes a drawing that provides a visual image of a story that she tells in the chapter. All of them bear her signature, Su Hua; some of them are also dated to 1952. These drawings make Ling's *Ancient Melodies* much less anonymous than Chen's narrative and add a personal and aesthetic touch to the book's appearance. This choice also facilitates a more nuanced mode of communication with her reader. This more visual than textual mode of communication expands Fisher's narrative paradigm that views stories as capable of carrying images and ideas back and forth across countries' boundaries and in this way helping human communication (Fischer, 1984:8). By attaching the visual images to her narrative Ling attaches an extra connection thread to her readers, a connection that makes her message more accessible and comprehensible.

The edition that I have worked with is the second impression of the original 1953 publication. Republished in 1969 by the same publishing house, the Hogarth Press, this hardback has a pink cover with a title – *Ancient Melodies* – and the author's name, Su Hua, right at the top of the cover. The rest of the page is occupied by a hand drawing which portrays a little girl with two pigtails flying a kite shaped as a butterfly and an older woman who observes the child play. Both the title and the author's name look as if written with ink using a thin brush, which together with the drawing, make the whole impression of the cover as a carefully chosen piece of art. A trained painter even before she became a writer,[168] Ling Shuhua was clearly aware of how to present her book artistically and awaken certain feelings and expectations towards the book in her reader. The cover, thus, suggests that the contents of this book might dwell on her childhood years at the same time hinting at Ling's artistic abilities. Although there is no hard evidence that Ling had designed this cover herself, we can assume that, since the drawing on the cover is the same drawing that she used for illustration of her narrative (p. 206), she must have had at least some influence on its layout. Hence already from the very first glimpse at the book cover the reader perceives at least two images of the author: a childhood image of an innocent little girl thoroughly enjoying one of the greatest children's amusements of that time – flying a kite – and another image of a grown up artist

[168] *Ancient Melodies* narrate meticulously of painting lessons that she had received in her childhood (Ling, 1969:78-88).

demonstrating her talent as a painter on the cover page. In the chapter called "My Foster-Parents" (Ling, 1969:192-211) the reader will learn that this drawing – a girl flying a kite – is the reflection of one of her happiest memories. The woman who watches the child Ling Shuhua play is her Foster Mother – the person credited for creating genuinely joyous moments in Ling's quite unhappy childhood. Foster Mother, the kindest and most talented woman that Ling knew during her childhood is her greatest role model and is therefore allotted a space on the front page.

Born at the turn of the 20th century, Ling Shuhua was exposed to similar social, cultural and historical circumstances as the other two female autobiographers. However, the approach and the narrative form that she adopted for her life-story differ significantly from the self-professed autobiographies viewed in the previous chapters. Both the title and the structure of *Ancient Melodies* suggest a form that reminds more of a collection of short stories than an autobiography. Some of the chapter headings do not even seem to have any relation to the autobiographical mode, as for example: "Red-coat Man," "A Plot," "Ghost Stories," "Sakura Festival," while others, such as "My Mother's Marriage," "Our Great-Uncle," "My First Lesson in Painting," or "My Foster-Parents" send a strong autobiographical impulse. Thus apart from the obvious avoidance of calling her narrative an autobiography, a fact which leaves Ling's reader second-guessing the motives and objectives concerning her narrative, the choice of chapter headings might also partially bear responsibility for the readers' perplexity as to how they are to read this book - as a story of her life or as fiction.

An older woman in 1953 at the point of publishing her narrative, Ling, however, often adopts the narrative voice of a child and shares glimpses of what at first glance looks like a story of her own childhood. Focusing the narrative on her upbringing as a member of an illustrious family, she portrays the development of her talent as a painter. To constitute her artistic talent, not only does she assemble a range of images of famous ancestor painters and other artistically distinguished family members, she also portrays teachers (both male and female) and servants (the gardener of the family) who with their knowledge and expertise influenced her and taught her to see and appreciate the beauty of the world around her.

Tempting as it is to view Ling's narrative only in terms of being a story of her early years, I argue that it can also be approached as a story of a grownup with unrealized dreams. Discovered by chance, her talent for painting was cultivated through her childhood years and made her the favorite daughter of her father. She became an object of envy among numerous concubines and half-siblings,

a fact which no-doubt boosted her almost non-existent self-confidence as a female child who was not wanted in the family.[169] Having a magnificent background of prominent scholars and artists both on her mother's and her father's side, she was taught by court painters and could genuinely expect to become someone important within the art world. As her niece, Sasha Su-Ling Welland, argues, Ling Shuhua "had once imagined herself at the center of the Beijing art world – studying ancient paintings in her job at the Palace Museum, hosting literary salons, and writing to prove women's worth in all of these endeavors" (Welland, 2006:222). Instead she became "a faculty wife and a mother" (Ibid., p. 222), two roles that she did not feel comfortable with and only naturally excluded from *Ancient Melodies*. These reminiscences of her childhood years might therefore be viewed as an attempt to process the fact that her aspirations were not fulfilled the way she might have hoped. By looking back to her childhood's bitter-sweet memories she not only tries to come to terms with lost hopes but also pays tribute to traditional Chinese culture which she owes so much to and which she has deep affection and respect for. As Eileen Cheng observes, Ling Shuhua in her autobiography could freely acknowledge her appreciation of traditional culture and portray "the exquisite details of the daily lives and rituals of 'a forgotten world' that Western critics appreciated" (Cheng, 2007:365) since it was exactly Western publishers who were responsible for the promotion of her book. Ling's attitude towards the same issues appears quite different in her earliest short story collection *Temple of Flowers* (1928) which, as Cheng argues, is largely due to Ling's dependency on another group of publishers who belonged to the young intellectual Chinese men like her own husband. She elaborates: "Writing as an emerging modern woman writer, whose works were being promoted by a host of modern men of letters with a distinctly anti-traditional stance, may have precluded such touching tributes to traditional culture" (Ibid., p.365). This observation clearly illustrates how an author not only chooses certain topics and images framing them differently for a different audience, but is also dependent on those who would promote and publish those images later.

Portraying China and its culture for the Western curious gaze, she selects a range of images that might suit the taste and expectations of her readers. Along with the depiction of superstitious, bizarre, exotic, cruel and altogether strange traditional customs which belong to a group of images that are carefully chosen to satisfy her reader' expectations of an exotic China and their craving for

[169] The motif of being an unwanted child of her mother, who only had daughters, or an unwanted and neglected child in her family, where there were too many daughters and too few sons, appears several times in Ling's narrative and is obviously a painful recollection for her.

chinoiserie, she also presents her journey towards becoming an artist and talks to her reader from the position of an artist. The range of male images is limited mostly to portrayal of distinguished scholars, painters and calligraphers. However, just as in the case of Chen Hengzhe and Yang Buwei, Ling uses these images of powerful men in order to define her talent, her background and her future bright prospects. Meanwhile the spectrum of female images is much more versatile. Ling gets inspiration for those images from the real-life female relatives – concubines, mothers and sisters; from history – the Tang Empress; and, finally, from literary images – fox spirits, female heroes (women who dressed as men to pass civil examination) and others. Some of these images fit into Pearson and Pope's typology of literary female portraits, some do not or fit only partially. Ling's obvious tendency to favor female images in her narrative indicates that, although she owes the male world for her education and encouragement of her talent, it is the female world that is closer to her. These are the images that she understands and has compassion with. She portrays this world both through the gaze of an innocent child narrator and through the reflective perspective of an older woman incorporating her own life among these images. With this she not only encourages her reader to reevaluate his or her own life by looking back on his or her past, she also elevates her personal details to the level of artistic and historic importance. She therefore in a way fulfills her dream of becoming an artist, an interpreter of Chinese tradition, which she perceives as a form of art in itself. She manifests herself as a true artist and inscribes her vision of China's aesthetic qualities.

Although Pearson and Pope's typology of female images is useful in terms of assessing the images that Ling Shuhua chose for her narrative, it is mainly the image of "Artist" that she applies to herself and that stands out as the one that she favors most. Among many wives, "mothers" and siblings, she portrays herself as a child artist whose life suddenly changed when her talent was discovered. Furthermore, she relies on the examples of other female artists, the one who became her tutor and her very talented Foster Mother, to construct an identity for herself as a grownup artist who now uses this talent to portray her journey towards this position. In a way, *Ancient Melodies* becomes an example of a versatile piece of art, a piece that combines her skills as a writer and a painter.

This autobiography has received more academic attention than the two narratives considered in previous chapters. Among scholars who have studied it there seems to be a unanimous consent that Ling's narrative is told from a little girl's perspective and therefore reminds of an infantile and

exotic "child's fantasy tale" than a grownup story (Ng, 1993:246).[170] Although I cannot deny that many chapters of this narrative are told through the voice of a child, I argue that this text can be viewed from other angles if we allow the possibility of the presence of the adult woman writer in it. Indeed, it was not the child Ling Shuhua who wrote this book, but a grownup who consciously took a decision to tell of her China from the viewpoint of an innocent child. This chapter discusses possible reasons for such a choice.

The contents of *Ancient Melodies* in many ways resemble Yang's and Chen's narratives, as all these women were born into similar social backgrounds and lived during the same age and struggled to cope with similar challenges that the society weighted against them. Ling Shuhua told a story about a girl from a wealthy family who, by virtue of her family standing and the winning progressive views on girls' education at the turn of the century, was taught to read and write, went to Japan to study, and entered a modern school upon her coming home. Thus such themes as her family's scholarly and artistic background and her own education within this environment can be distinguished as the main plot lines of her narrative.

While these themes are common to all three autobiographers' narratives, the way that these autobiographies differ from each other is through the identity which each narrator assumes in her older age. The narratives of each of them are shaped from the position of this identity in order to show the evolution of a younger self into the older self. Chen Hengzhe speaks from the position of a scholar and therefore shapes her narrative as a journey of accumulation of knowledge towards her status of authority. Yang Buwei, inspite of having become "a commuter" between continents (Yang, 1967:255), an intercultural hybrid, portrays herself as a typical Chinese woman and her journey reflects this gradual realization of her main role in life. In the case of Ling Shuhua, this journey is twofold: from the position of an artist she shows her path towards becoming an artist in her childhood, describing herself as being "discovered," becoming the favorite child of her father, getting the very best painting teachers. At the same time she writes from the position of a talented artist who has not realized her potential to the fullest, but was stuck in the roles of wife and mother, and she takes the decisive action of reclaiming this position by writing an artistic autobiography. Ling's journey is not as dangerous and treacherous as that of Chen Hengzhe, neither is it a portrayal similar to Yang Buwei's life-journey of trying to fit numerous (often male) roles in order to come to

[170] Such scholars as Welland (2006), Liu Xiaoqing (2009), Zhang (2012), and others seem to be influenced by Ng's view and also consider *Ancient Melodies* in terms of Ling's childhood memories.

a realization that she is a first and foremost a woman. Instead, Ling's journey is all about the privilege of being allowed into a magnificent world of traditional male culture. It is about looking back at the origins of her talent when she, a timid girl, one among many in a large household, was discovered as a painter and suddenly learned what parental love was like. It is about reclaiming this great gift at an older age. *Ancient Melodies* marks the end of the childhood journey and the beginning of the new one where Ling Shuhua re-discovered and re-established her artistic abilities on her own without the help of a male relative through conscious self-searching in her autobiography and reevaluating the relationships that allowed her to become exceptional.

The focus of Ling's narrative on female images and their interpersonal relationships with each other and with their male counterparts marks, on the one hand, her own belonging to the female gender and therefore makes her accomplishments as an artist even more visible and remarkable. But on the other hand, she also differentiates and distances herself from the women of her family whom she describes as, if not decisively vicious and jealous, then as merely ordinary, underlining her own higher status of a female artist.

Ancient Melodies provides examples of female images from all walks of life – elite as well as lower class, real-life as well as belonging to the realm of literature. When the following examines Ling's narrative as a unique collection of portraits of Chinese women, it is necessary to underline their dependence on the male gender. It is very rare in Chinese culture that female images stand alone without male figures that shape their identity. Ling Shuhua's narrative is no exception to this rule. Many of the female images she portrays (herself included) are thus viewed through the prism of their relationship with her father and other male relatives.

In spite of the previous readings of Ling's narrative as a sharp feministic critic of the patriarchal oppression of Chinese women,[171] I will view it as an attempt to reconstruct her identity as an artist who is capable of interpreting traditional Chinese culture with both its beautiful and less attractive sides through a unique female aesthetic perspective. It was traditional Chinese culture to which she owed her upbringing, her initial education, her becoming an artist and a writer and she therefore considers herself as someone who can appreciate the essence of it and convey it to her reader. Although, the text of the book does not contain a description of her accomplishments as a grown artist, her presence can be felt through the selection and portrayal of the core constituents of

[171] See Liu Xiaoqing (2009:176-177), also Zhang (2012:591).

Chinese culture - painting, music, literature and philosophy. As trustworthy companions that support Ling's narrative, they take form in her own masterful descriptions of nature, through the depiction of literary masterpieces that she has read or listened to as a child, through her introduction of traditional Chinese music and through a few poems and literary and philosophical pieces that she translated herself for her narrative. Her artistic self is also in the drawings that she included in the narrative. Taking the role of the cultural interpreter, she invites her reader to have a look at this magnificent world of her childhood and traditional culture, a world aesthetically beautiful and fascinating.

When Ling Shuhua wrote an autobiographical account of her early life, she did so not so much in order to give a factual account of her life, but rather to create and re-create an image of herself as an artist and from this position interpret Chinese culture for the foreign reader. Therefore, in the following, treating Ling Shuhua's *Ancient Melodies* as an artistic construction, I will first examine the deviations her narrative exhibits from the norms ascribed to the genre of autobiography from the perspective of Western standards and the norms that Hu Shi had formulated in his call for biographical literature during the 1930s. This deviation can be seen in the choice of the title and the omission of the term "autobiography." It is also present in her choice to use fictional pieces of writing which were translated and included into *Ancient Melodies* and made this autobiography less trustworthy in terms of being a historical reference for future generations.

Following this focus on autobiography as a genre, I will assess the female images that Ling Shuhua employed through her narration and determine the kind of China she attempted to portray through them and why. First, I will address the issues that Ling feels are hard to talk about- those are the themes of the unhappiness of women within a big family household, especially if they do not bear male heirs; the themes of quarrels between concubines; the memories of being an unhappy and neglected child and images of corporal punishment. The female images of oppression, unhappiness and even violence are portrayed through the narrative voice of a child. Ling uses this narrative device not only to distance herself from the unpleasant memories but also to give her reader enough space for the interpretation of the described images on his or her own, without the patronizing voice of the author (as is the case with Chen Hengzhe). The second series of images that Ling devotes her narrative to are those which support her being discovered as a talented child and her training and education for the future as a female artist. Among these are the images of cultivated, culturally and artistically refined females who either inspired Ling to see the beauty of the world around her, just

as her Foster Mother did, or those who taught her to paint, as her painting tutor at the court of the Empress. Although Ling's narrative does contain a few female images that serve as role models for her as a child, it is the male figures that clearly do the job of discovering the talent in the little girl and allow her develop it. It is also male ancestors who were celebrated painters who are credited with the fact that such a talent could manifest itself at all in Ling's childhood years. Although the male images obviously bear the responsibility for recognizing the future promise in the little girl, Ling is not content only with this role. She also demonstrates that she, as a grownup, is capable of becoming an authority and, as an artist, of revealing true Chinese culture to the foreign audience. Therefore, Ling's interpretation of traditional Chinese culture, its literature, philosophy, music and painting, and the images connected to their cultural peculiarities, constitute the concluding part of my inquiry. These themes will furnish the discussion in the following sections of this chapter.

2.Autobiography not Like the Others

In spite of all the similarities Ling's autobiography bears to other female self-narratives considered earlier, it also differs from them in a few significant ways. Unlike other authors who had declared the genre of their narrative on the front page by calling it an autobiography, Ling Shuhua does nothing of the kind. Judged from its title, it is impossible to conclude that *Ancient Melodies* might belong to the genre of autobiography. In the preface to her narrative she does not personally explain the nature of her book, the motives behind her writing it or whom her book is intended for. Instead, she leaves this task to another person. These choices make it difficult for her readers to place the book according to its genre at first glance. One is left wondering whether it is a novel, a collection of short stories or, perhaps, autobiographical essays.[172]

This section addresses the probable reasons for the choice of the narrative format that Ling Shuhua adopted for *Ancient Melodies* and discusses what implications a narrative with an undefined autobiographical objective might have for a reader trying to decode the author's identity.

[172] Such ambiguity led to differences in reception of this narrative: as an autobiography, as fiction or as autobiographical fiction. See Hong who calls *Ancient Melodies* "autobiographical work of fiction" (2007:236); Cheng, for whom it is a "fictionalized autobiography" (2007:331); Liu Xiaoqing who calls it Ling's "English autobiography;" (2009:147); Ng who speculates whether it is an autobiography or a child's fantasy tale (1993:246), and Welland who begins her study assuming that she works with an autobiography only to discover that some of its chapters had been previously published as fiction (Welland, 2006:20).

The ambiguity about the genre of Ling's narrative could be avoided had the author established an "autobiographical pact" with the reader. Autobiographical pact, a concept elaborated by Philippe Lejeunne in 1970s, is a contract between the author and the reader that the piece of writing in front of the reader is an autobiography because the author, the narrator and the character share the same name (Lejeune, 1989:5). When Ling Shuhua fails to declare *Ancient Melodies* as an autobiography – a text written by her and about her life – and, moreover, changes her father's surname to Ding while referring to herself merely as either "I" or "Little Tenth,"[173] then the autobiographical pact becomes vague, if not non-existent. A keen reader would probably spend some time reflecting over the text and assume that it might be an autobiography as the narrative is told in the first person singular and, as mentioned above, because some of the chapter titles bear a very strong autobiographical impulse. Nonetheless, the uncertainty about the genre would remain. Uncertainty about genre can lead to uncertainty about what the author really wants to say with this narrative.

Besides ordinary readers who might have their doubts about the book's genre, *Ancient Melodies* was naturally read by scholarly critics who have access to materials about this book which can shed some light on the nature of the narrative. Among those materials is private correspondence between Ling Shuhua and Julian Bell (1908-1937),[174] his aunt Virginia Woolf and Woolf's close friend Vita Sackville-West. There are quite a few scholarly studies to this day which have contributed to the literary criticism of *Ancient Melodies,* and although the majority treat the book as an autobiography or a memoir,[175] they exhibit doubt about which genre this book should belong to. Thus, some ambiguity about this question remains even within the scholarly world as well.

Janet Ng, to my knowledge, the first scholar to have completed an English study of Ling Shuhua's personal narrative (Ng, 1993), shows such ambiguity in her work. Very critical in her approach, Ng, as mentioned before, although calling Ling's book autobiography, states that "Ancient Melodies has almost the quality of a child's fantasy tale in its exoticism and infantilism, as

[173] Welland argues that Ling Shuhua was not the little Tenth or the youngest daughter in the family as she had portrayed herself in the autobiography as there was another child born after her. This child was Welland's own grandmother Ling Shuhao (Welland, 2006:10). Welland also addressed the discrepancy in the birth dates and determined that Ling Shuhua was born in 1900 and not in 1904, as she had claimed (Ibid., p.4).

[174] Julian Bell was an English poet and a nephew to Virginia Woolf. His affair with Ling Shuhua while he was teaching English literature in China provided the background for a controversial book by Hong Ying *K: The Art of Love,* see Hong (2011).

[175] See Ng (1993), Shih (2001), Liu (2004), Welland (2006), Zhang (2012). However, Jeesoon Hong calls *Ancient Melodies* an autobiographical work of fiction, see Hong (2007).

Ling speaks through the voice of a small child" (Ng, 1993:276). Insisting on her view of *Ancient Melodies* as a work belonging to a fictive children's literature genre, Ng elaborates furthermore:

> The title of Ling's book Ancient Melodies, which sounds like a title of a fairy tale, bespeaks her urge to create a fantasy tale. Like a fairy tale, Ling's work describes a memory of fantasy; also like fairy tales, it has poignant, but for reasons suppressed, relevance to the author's contemporary issue" (Ng, 1993:279).

Ling's narrative is thus viewed as a genre of a mixed autobiography or autobiography with a fairy-tale-like quality.

While Ng makes her assumptions about the mixed nature of *Ancient Melodies'* genre judged from its contents and the way the narrative is told in a child-like fashion, Sasha Su-Ling Welland raises doubts on other grounds. A professor of anthropology and Ling's grand-niece, Welland, in her search for the truth about her own grandmother's and grand-aunt's past, discovered many different versions of the two sisters' realities as they told them orally during interviews or wrote them down as a personal narrative. Welland, like other scholars who have approached *Ancient Melodies*, seems to be of the opinion that this book "purports to be autobiography" (Welland, 2006:20). At the same time, having discovered that at least two chapters included in this book were originally written in Chinese as short stories, she raises the question of the boundaries between fiction and autobiography, between history and memory. She asks: "To what extent was the original story [Moving House] autobiographical?" (Welland, 2003:21).

Indeed, the two short stories that Welland mentions are *Banjia* 搬家 [Moving House] and *Yi jian xishi* 一件喜事 [A Happy Event]. The former was initially published in *Crescent Moon* 新月月刊[176] which was one of the leading journals of the 1920's. These two pieces appeared again in a collection of short stories *Little Brothers* in 1935. Only later were they translated into English, and under the same titles found their way into Ling's personal narrative with the main character's name changed into Ling Shuhua's narrative voice which says "I" (Welland, 2006:20 and 2006:222). Such sudden change of genres on the part of Ling Shuhua indeed raises many questions and doubts, which I will attend to shortly.

Another two pieces of writing that Ling Shuhua published in the 1950s prior to their appearance in *Ancient Melodies* are "Red Coat Man" and "Childhood in China." These two stories were later merged into the first chapter of her autobiography called "Red-coat Man" (orthography

[176] See Ling (1929).

as in the original). Written in English they appeared in *The Spectator*,[177] which, as Welland points out, was "a publication with which Vita [Sackville-West] and her husband Harold Nicolson had close connections" (Welland, 2006:304). A year later, another two stories were published in *Country Life.*[178] This time those were "Our Old Gardener" and "Visit to a Royal Gardener" which, according to Welland, "were accompanied by her paintings" (Welland, 2006:305). These stories were also merged into only one chapter in *Ancient Melodies* and were given the title "Our old Gardener and his Friend."

These stories were obviously written in English from the very beginning (and therefore, clearly for the English speaking audience) and Ling's activities in publishing them separately from her monograph suggest her attempt to "feel the temperature" of the British reader in terms of the possible future reception of her autobiography. Her other two chapters, however, which, as mentioned, were originally written in Chinese and included in some of her short story collections were not initially intended for her autobiography but probably selected as suitable at a later point in time and thereafter translated into English. This fact does not mean, though, that the fictive stories that were rearranged into autobiographical chapters have nothing to do with Ling's childhood and are a product of pure imagination. As Ling Shuhua admits in the preface to *Little Brothers*, some of the stories included in the volume were taken from her own past life and we can therefore assume that they are autobiographical.[179] Welland's questioning of the extent to which Ling's original short stories were autobiographical is answered by Ling Shuhua herself. However the doubts about the extent to which Ling's autobiography is fictive remain. These doubts are based on the ease with which Ling Shuhua jumped from the one genre into another, redressing short stories into autobiographical narratives by mere adjustment of the narrative voice. Since the genre of autobiography was a new phenomenon in China, its textual space and boundaries were tested and experimented with and Ling's attempt to bring some events of her life from the world of fiction into the world of self-writing is probably to be expected. Besides, the beginning of the 20th century is noted for Chinese writers' tendency to write fiction autobiographically,[180] and it comes therefore as

[177] In Western publications Ling Shuhua called herself as Su-Hua Ling Chen, adding her husband's name Chen. For her publications in *The Spectator* see, therefore, Chen (1950a, 1950b).
[178] For Ling's publications in *Country Life*, see Chen (1951) and Chen (1952).
[179]Chen Jianjun (2011) cites the preface to Ling's Little Brothers in her article "Ling Shuhua's *Little Brothers*."
[180] Wang Jing observes that "educated women camouflaged their life stories as fiction during the May Fourth Period (1917-1926). They made their interior experience, romantic love in particular, the major subject matter" (Wang Jing, 2003:11). Leo Ou-fan Lee calls it "autobiographical mania" (Lee, 1973:285) of Chinese readers and writers (Cited in Wang Jing, 2003:11-12).

no surprise that the stories "Moving House" and "A Happy Event" could make their way into Ling's autobiography under the same headings.

As stated above, the practice of using their personal experiences to write works of fiction prior to writing their autobiography was not something new for Chinese writers whether male or female.[181] As Kawai Kōsō has argued in his study of Chinese autobiographical writing (see Chapter 2), traditional serious literature in China was generally perceived as autobiographical, as it was based on real life facts (Kōsō, 1998:9-12). Fiction, on the other hand, was considered as low class writing as it had nothing to do with reality. As the attitudes towards fiction in China began to change and the genre of the novel and, much later, the genre of short stories, won their place as worthy companions to traditionally respected historical and biographical writings, Chinese writers continued the old tradition and started creating fiction from the perspective of real life events, either their own or other people's. In this way, just as many Chinese writers of the beginning of the 20th century described their childhood experiences in their short stories, so did Ling Shuhua; not in order to deliberately fictionalize her memories, but rather because the genre of short stories was the accepted format for biographical writing and because the genre of autobiography was not yet available or defined. This practice on the part of Chinese writers causes some doubt among Western scholars who, being accustomed to a very sharp distinction between fictitious and factual writing, have difficulties determining whether they should take Ling's shift from fiction to autobiography as an expression of the fictionality of her autobiography.[182]

When Welland claims that *Ancient Melodies* purports to be autobiography but in a way fails, when Ng calls it autobiography with fantasy-like qualities, they do not hesitate to use the term autobiography. Also other scholars exhibit the same persistency in calling it an autobiography. Shu-mei Shih views Ling's narrative as a feminist autobiography which exhibits traits of voluntary self-Orientalization in order to reach out for its English readers (Shih, 2001:218). Xiaoqing Liu treats *Ancient Melodies* as an autobiography where Ling deliberately foreignized herself in the process of translating her life and identity for her English audience (Liu Xiaoqing, 2009:151). While the ideas of "self-Orientalization" and "foreignization" are somewhat similar, the latter bears a more positive connotation than the former. The idea of foreignizing in terms of translation originates as already discussed in Chapter Four, comes from the thoughts Friedrich Schleiermacher who argued that there

[181] See, for instance, Lu Yin's *Haibin guren* 海滨故人 [Old Friends by the Sea] (2012:41-80), Hu Shi's *Wo de muqin de dinghun* 我的母亲的订婚 [My Mother's Betrothal], (2005:17-39).
[182] SeeWelland (2006:21); Ng (1994:246).

are only two methods of translating: "Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him. Or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the authors toward him" (Quoted in Lefevere, 1992:149). Since most translation moves the author closer to the reader, i.e. domesticating him/her, an unequal cultural exchange takes place. Therefore, by deliberate foreignizing of translation, a reversed action takes place, pressuring the reader to register the differences of another culture and another language from his own. As Liu works with the idea of foreignizing translation in terms of Ling's narrative, she recognizes the pattern of foreignization in Ling's approach. As *Ancient Melodies* was not translated into English by a translator, but was written by Ling as a form of translation of Chinese culture, as a "strategic construction," or a frame, in Baker's terms, it was meant for the English reader to register and have a taste of the "real China" (Liu Xiaoqing, 2009:152). Liu cites Ling's letter to Woolf to prove her point:

> If my book could give English readers some pictures of Chinese lives, some impression about the Chinese who are as ordinary as English people, some truth of life and sex which your people never have a chance to see but it [is] even seen by a child of the East, I shall be contented (Quoted in Liu Xiaoqing, 2009:152).

While I do agree that Ling might have applied a strategy of foreignization, the aim that she might have pursued in her narrative was not only to correct foreign stereotypes but diversify Western ideas about Chinese women as well.

The intention to portray an authentic China, providing a description of real life facts, gives the above-discussed scholars an impression that Ling's narrative can definitely be discussed as belonging to the autobiographical genre, albeit with some deviations from it. All these scholars apparently have more knowledge of Ling Shuhua's intentions about the genre of her book. This knowledge remains unavailable to an ordinary reader who merely holds the copy of the book in his hands. This obvious avoidance of defining the genre of the narrative on Ling's part makes me wonder whether Ling Shuhua wanted her book to be read as an autobiography in a narrow understanding of this term or whether she rather thought of it as a rich collection of authentic female images available in Chinese culture.

In the introduction to *Ancient Melodies*, Vita Sackville–West, whom Ling Shuhua had asked for the favor of writing a few words of introduction to her narrative and even think of a title for it (Hong, 2007:246-247), is just as careful in her avoidance of the term autobiography. Calling it "delightful sketches of a vanished way of life on the other side of the world," "these memories," or "the recollections of a contemporary" (Sackville-West, 1969:8-10) she gives a hint to the reader as

to what kind of text is in front of him or her but no more than that. One wonders whether the two women had had an agreement about how *not* to call *Ancient Melodies,* leaving it up to the reader to decode fictive and autobiographical elements in it.

The possible pact between Sackville-West and Ling on not mentioning the term autobiography becomes even more plausible if we take a closer look at a letter of encouragement which Virginia Woolf sent to Ling Shuhua. In this letter, dated April 5th 1938, Virginia Woolf sends a few words of consolation for Ling Shuhua's grief about the consequences of the Japanese invasion of China and advises her to work, as work is the only thing that can ease one's mind and focus it on "something worth doing in itself" (Woolf, 1980:221).What Wolf means by "work" is writing an "account of [Ling Shuhua's] life in English" (Ibid., p. 221), the wording, which Sackville-West in her introduction very conveniently avoids. Virginia Woolf had indeed discussed Ling's talent as a writer with her nephew, Julian Bell, who had had a close relationship with Ling Shuhua and was of the opinion that she had lived "a most interesting life" and should therefore write about it. His aunt could not agree more as she encouraged Ling Shuhua to write:

> Will you make a beginning, and put down exactly anything you remember? As no one in England knows you, the book could be more free than usual. Then I would see if it could not be printed. But, please, think of this: not merely as a distraction, but as a work that would be of great value to other people too. I find autobiographies much better than novels (Woolf, 1980:221).[183]

Among the books that Woolf advises Ling Shuhua to read for inspiration are letters of Cowper[184] (1731-1800) and Walpole (1717-1797)[185] which belong to the genre of self-writing. Furthermore, Woolf recommends Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë,* a book that could give Ling an idea of how one could write about a life (Woolf, 1980:222). Clearly, Ling Shuhua was encouraged to write

[183] A curious detail is that Ling Shuhua, apparently was not the only Chinese writer that Woolf encouraged to write an autobiography. She was not even the first one. Ling's contemporary female writer, Bing Xin writes in her 1979 autobiographical essay *Wode guxiang* 我的故乡[My native place] about her personal meeting with Virginia Woolf (Bing, 2001:181). While in London in 1936 Bing Xin had had tea with Woolf discussing casually weather, poetry, and fiction. At some point Woolf suddenly suggested that Bing Xin should write her autobiography. This Bing Xin politely declined, arguing that the Chinese do not have a tradition of autobiography and that she would not know what to write about herself (Ibid., p. 181). Woolf's suggestion to use Bing's own life to portray the society of her time, a description that could be of value for future historians, is clearly the same that she used for Ling Shuhua's encouragement. It is noteworthy that while one woman would not consider the idea of writing about her life until many decades later (Bing Xin published her autobiographical essays in late 1970's, see Bing (2001:149-207), another woman of the same age, background and nationality took up this endeavor and succeeded in accomplishing it!

[184] Here Woolf refers to the compilation of letters which belonged to English poet William Cowper. See Cowper (1812). On his biography, see Drabble (1986:236-7).

[185] Horace Walpole was an English art historian and a man of letters. See Walpole (1857). On his biography, see Drabble (1986:1040-1).

an autobiography, a story of her life, giving "as many natural details of the life, of the house, of the furniture" (Woolf, 1980:221) as she pleased. It is noteworthy that Woolf's encouragement and request for many special and peculiar details about the lifestyle of Ling's household echoes the 18th century's European excitement about everything Chinese, i.e. chinoiserie.

Encouraged to write an autobiography, writing *Ancient Melodies* as an autobiography, the question of why Ling Shuhua failed to promote it as one, remains unanswered. This decision has serious implications for how the reader is to decode her identity. There could be thousands of reasons for this choice, and I ponder whether one of them could be Ling's conscious artistic intention. Perhaps Ling Shuhua did not exactly think that *Ancient Melodies* was a self-portrait. Artist as she was, Ling rather combines the episodal recollections of her early childhood and adolescence in a series of scenes arranging them in a line which slowly moves in front of the reader's gaze. Furnishing the Western audience with images of China, Ling Shuhua paints episodes of her life as a collage of authentic Chinese still-images. The drawings that she supplies in her volume might even strengthen this impression.

Also, very well aware that parts of her personal narrative had been published as fiction before, Ling Shuhua could have felt that hers was not as truthful a historical account of life as Hu Shi's *Self-Narrative at Forty* where he proposed autobiography should serve as a record for future historians. Although Hu Shi did include a fictive chapter describing his mother's betrothal into his autobiography, he made an extensive argument about this choice and avoided further confusion between the factual and fictional details in his narrative. In Ling Shuhua's case, the boundaries between fact and fiction in the formats that she had used to write her personal experiences became too blurred. She could also have chosen to blur these boundaries intentionally planning to intrigue her reader. She might have trusted her reader to make up his or her own mind as to what kind of book it was. A true artist always leaves space for the audience's personal interpretation of the work of art.

3.Self-promotion by the Hand of the Other

Unlike the self-professed autobiographies written by Chen Hengzhe and Yang Buwei, Ling Shuhua's does not have a preface where the author outlines her objectives in writing the narrative. Nor does she indicate who this book was written for. An artist who has chosen to create an aesthetic

autobiography devoid of traditional self-presentation, Ling nevertheless needed an introduction of a kind. Sackville-West's opening serves exactly this purpose. For Ling, who tried to establish herself as a serious cultural interpreter for the English reader, an introduction written on her own would not do the trick. Unknown to the broad British public, Ling Shuhua and her autobiography risked going unnoticed and remaining in oblivion, just as Chen Hengzhe's autobiography was destined to. It seems that Ling knew how to use her connections with the Bloomsbury group[186] to her advantage – she had asked Sackville-West for the friendly gesture of writing an introduction for her book, a gesture that she was more than happy to make in order to help Ling. The correspondence between the two reveals Sackville-West's considerable contribution to the final touches of *Ancient Melodies*. Ling not only enjoyed the benefits of Sackville-West's introduction, but had asked for help with suggesting a possible title for her book. Very enthusiastic in her help, Sackville-West even recommended what lines Ling could use as an opening:

> I have been thinking of a title of your book. I thought Ancient Melodies. This is from Arthur Waley's translation '170 Chinese poems' page 125. Have you got this book? I thought you might give your book this title and then publish some further lines of the poem on the first sheet, to explain where the title came from:
>
> Ancient Melodies, …
>
> Not appealing to present man's taste.
>
> Light and colour are faded from the jade stops:
>
> Dust has covered the rose-red strings.[187]

Hence, as the reader opens the book, a citation that Sackville-West suggested for Ling Shuhua to explain the title of her narrative *Ancient Melodies* is presented. It reads as follows:

> "Of cord and cassia-wood is the lute compounded;
> Within it lie ancient melodies."

A reader, not familiar with Chinese poetry would probably read these lines and see a connection between the ancient melodies that are mentioned in the poem and the title of the book. He might then either continue reading, content that the mystery about the title is solved, or make another conclusion that, since the lute is an ancient musical instrument which produces ancient melodies, then the contents of this book might well be about something that happened a very long time ago.

[186] Bloomsbury group, an influential group of British intellectuals who lived and worked near Bloomsbury, London in the first half of the 20th century. For a short introduction, see Drabble (1986:110).
[187] I use Sackville-West's letter to Ling Shuhua as it is cited in Hong (2007:246-247).

Luckily, in the introduction to *Ancient Melodies* Vita Sackville-West provides an extended explanation to where these lines come from and even cites the first ten lines from this otherwise twelve-line poem. I cite it in its full version here:

> The Old Lute
> Of cord and cassia-wood is the lute compounded;
> Within it lie ancient melodies.
> Ancient melodies weak and savourless,
> Not appealing to present men's taste.
> Light and colour are faded from the jade stops;
> Dust has covered the rose-red strings.
> Decay and ruin came to it long ago,
> But the sound that is left is still cold and clear.
> I do not refuse to play it, if you want me to;
> But even if I play people will not listen.
> How did it come to be neglected so?
> Because of the Ch'iang flute and the zithern of Ch'in![188]

Written by Bo Juyi 白居易 (772-846)[189] and translated by Arthur Waley,[190] this Tang poem tells of the decay of a once very popular music instrument because it is now "not appealing to present men's taste." Ling Shuhua, who was coaxed into writing her own life story, uses the lines of this poem metaphorically, showing that traditional Chinese culture has much to offer even to a modern man/woman whose tastes have changed. She agrees to tell her story, a decision that corresponds to the following line from the poem: "I do not refuse to play it [the lute], if you want me to" (Waley, 1946:126), but at the same time she has second thoughts doubting whether her story would interest anyone – "But even if I play, people will not listen."

Sackville-West however does help the reader to decipher Ling's metaphoric message, saying: "I trust that 'ancient melodies' of the title will not meet with the fate prophesied for the old harp in the poem, but that an English audience will be only too willing to listen" (Sackville-West, 1969:10). Although Sackville-West chose to leave out the two concluding lines of the poem, perhaps because they would be unintelligible for the Western reader, I believe that they are crucial for understanding Ling's position on yet another topic of her book – the struggle between tradition and modernity. Although not to be found anywhere in the book, the concluding two lines of the poem are symbolic indeed:

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[188] Translation from Waley (1946:126).
[189] On the life and work of the Tang poet and a critical assessment, see Hinton (2008) or Owen (2006).
[190] On the life and work of the English sinologist, see Drabble (1986:1039).

"How did it [the lute] come to be neglected so?
Because of the Ch'iang flute and the zithern of Ch'in!"

In the 1946 edition of his book *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems,* Arthur Waley made a footnote to the last line of this poem pointing out that the "Ch'iang flute and the zither of Ch'in" are "non-classical instruments" (Waley 1946:126).[191] Thus, the lute, representing the classical musical tradition, is replaced by some more modern instruments – the flute and the zither – which explains the neglecting of the lute. As we will see later, Ling Shuhua, just as the other female authors that I discussed above, was caught in a time when traditional values and modern ones were contesting for power. However, unlike Chen Hengzhe, Ling does not criticize traditional Chinese culture. On the contrary, throughout the whole of the book one can sense the notes of nostalgia about a past beauty which no longer appeals to modern people and therefore has been replaced by modern tunes.

When Ling Shuhua used a piece of old Chinese poetry as a symbolic introduction to her book (although after Sackville-West's advice) she succeeded in conveying yet another image of herself – a highly cultured woman who appreciated classical poetry and was well read in it or was able to utilize its allusive qualities. Ling invests much effort into the construction of this image. As an older artist who is now determined to prove that she is capable of defining herself, rather than be defined by the male relatives, she finds a fellow female writer to make an introduction to her narrative. This was quite a surprising choice for a Chinese female writer/autobiographer. It seems that female writing in the early 20th century China, whether a collection of short stories or an autobiography, would almost certainly have an introduction by a male authority. Indeed, to ask a well-known contemporary intellectual to write an introduction to one's autobiography seems to have been a common trend among many female writers. Among female autobiographers who used this strategy, we find Yang Buwei who wanted Hu Shi to write an introduction for her autobiography[192] but ended up writing it together with her own husband, the famous linguist Zhao Yuanren (Yang, 1947). Xie Binying's autobiography also bears a preface by the famous writer and translator Lin Yutang (Hsieh, 1940), while Shao Xunmei 邵洵美 (1906-1968), Chinese poet and publisher, (although after Lu Yin's death) wrote an introduction to Lu Yin's autobiography (Lu, 2011). It is easy to notice that all of these introduction writers are men, quite prominent men in

[191] The 1947 edition calls them "[b]arbarous modern instruments."

[192] For Hu Shi's encouragement of Yang Buwei's work on her autobiography and his promise to write a word of introduction, see Yang (1987:3-4). See also footnote 89 in Chapter 3 for my hypothesis to why Yang only foregrounds Hu's role for her autobiography in the Chinese version of her narrative and never mentions him in her English autobiography.

their time. To have an introduction to one's autobiography written by such personalities constituted a stamp of approval from someone with a higher authority legitimizing that this autobiography is worthy of broad public attention.

For Ling Shuhua, it is Sackville-West who fulfils the same function in relation to *Ancient Melodies*. Although Ling's decision to ask a fellow female writer to introduce her work might suggest that Ling was trying to highlight the power of a female authority who did not have to be dependent on male approval, there are undoubtedly other reasons for this choice. Writing her autobiography in English and intending to have it published in England, Ling Shuhua obviously needed someone with a certain reputation in England to introduce her book. When Sackville-West's introduction furthermore reveals the details about the correspondence that took place in 1938-9 between Ling Shuhua and Virginia Woolf, who seemed to be very complimentary about Ling's work, the worth of *Ancient Melodies* as a literary achievement becomes even greater. Sackville-West's help in promoting Ling's book does not end with writing an introduction to it. As Jeesoon Hong discovered from the correspondence between the two women, well-connected in literary circles, Sackville-West even arranged for a positive review of the book by Harold Acton (1904-1994) who knew China well[193] and Arthur Waley even prior to its publication. She even cites lines from this letter: "I will tell Harold to review it in *The Observer*, because I know it is a book he will appreciate and a review in *The Observer* sells a lot of copies!" (Hong, 2007:247). It is worth noting here that the positive reviews of Ling's narrative are written by no other than men – Englishmen – whose views of China were influential in Britain in the mid-twentieth century as they had deep knowledge about China and its culture. Their praising words sent a signal to the broad English audience that *Ancient Melodies* was worth spending leisure time on.

Helped on its way by Virginia Woolf's intimate friend and other associates,[194] Ling's narrative made a worthy entrance and enjoyed a warm reception in England. However, *Ancient Melodies*, by virtue of such a presentation, was interpreted and introduced through the lens of the Western gaze. Sackville-West presented it as exotic reading and as having "Arabian Nights quality" (Sackville-West, 1969:10). She cites Woolf saying that she finds Ling's "similes strange and poetical," (Ibid., p.8) defining this narrative as "strange" and "charming." Thus *Ancient Melodies* is launched with some reading guidelines for the British audience. The reader expects to see images of

[193] For a short biography, see Drabble (1986:5).

[194] Jeeson Hong writes that "Virginia Woolf's involvement loomed large in the reception of the book, both in China and in England, and contributed to its success" (Hong, 2007:246).

an unfamiliar, strange and fascinating way of life, a depiction which Ling Shuhua masterfully complies with. Ling's personal narrative is a mixture of traditional (and therefore perceived as 'exotic') and modern female images that she herself had glimpses of when growing up. In the following I will go into more detail about the images that Ling utilizes from the perspective of a child as a way of distancing herself from them. These images correspond to Pope and Pearson's heroines – wives, mothers and daughters, roles often linked with injustice, suffrage and male dominance in China. As these are the images that have to do with the less beautiful side of Chinese culture and are hard to speak about without criticizing them, Ling invites the reader to view them from the non-judgmental perspective of a child.

Ling Shuhua as a Child Narrator

While Chen Hengzhe dealt with images of female oppression by patriarchal Chinese society openly condemning the practices that ruined women's lives, Ling Shuhua adopts a very different approach. In her narrative, the unhappiness, injustice and subjection of women are portrayed through the narrative voice of a child. In this way, creating a distance from the violent or unpleasant memories, Ling does not patronize her readers as Chen does, but, instead, allows the audience to come to its own conclusions.

The child-narrator mode, which received so much criticism from Janet Ng for being infantile and creating "a fantasy-tale" (Ng, 1993:279), can also be viewed from more positive positions as it can give the narrative certain advantages. Ng's criticism might give the impression that employing a child's viewpoint as a mode of narration and thus creating a fantasy reflects the author's inability to produce serious adult insights into her own life. However, it is not necessarily the case with Ling's narrative since it is not a children's book but an adult narrative. Ling's creative and experimental approach to her life-narrative allowed her to present events and situations from different and fresh perspectives. Whether a child experiences something serious and worrisome or something delightful and funny, the freshness and the immediateness of a child's reaction sets those events into a new perspective for a grownup. As bystanders in grownup situations, children see everything, although they do not necessarily understand what is going on. Ling Shuhua, by portraying old China with its gloomy sides through the child's perspective, acts like a camera for readers. Although her child narrator does not always understand what she sees or experiences, her

readers are likely to. In this manner, when Ling Shuhua adopts the position of a child narrator she becomes an observer of Chinese culture, a non-judgmental, un-biased and open-minded eye-witness.

Perhaps it is with this intention in mind that Ling Shuhua opens her narrative portraying herself, a little girl, as witness to two incidents that had made a great impression on her, incidents told through this very "camera lens" of a child. These have the power to capture a foreign reader's attention at once by virtue of their difference and strangeness. Instead of a traditional opening which would lay down the family background many generations back in history, she chooses to open with a "bombshell" and capture her reader's attention from the very start. Even the name of the chapter, "Red-coat Man," demonstrates that it is not the family that is going to stand out in this first recollection of hers, but an unfamiliar man without a name, wearing a red coat. The two episodes that Ling Shuhua describes here are accounts of gruesome events, one of them a public beheading of a prisoner and the other the sentencing to death of a stunningly beautiful woman who had killed her own mother-in-law.

This chapter confirms what an English reader might have fantasized about China – a wild place where a criminal would be publicly beheaded at the beginning of the twentieth century when England had already been "civilized" for over a hundred years. The portrayal of this incident also satisfied the readers' expectation of some exotic features that such public punishment might have in China. Ling Shuhua does it skillfully adding such details as the prisoner wearing a red coat, his proud singing prior to beheading, people's shouts of encouragement to the prisoner and an overall atmosphere of excited expectation of his death. Her own childish excitement can be felt when she describes the general air of festivity. She thinks that the man in the red coat is an actor since he has to sing on the stage. She does not realize that people's agitation and their shouts "Bravo!" are not due to their being happy, but intended as a way of support for the man who is about to die. When Ma Tao, the man servant who has brought Ling to watch the beheading, explains that the man has to be executed, her childish mind compares the criminal's beheading with the cook's cutting the chicken's head off. At first she is puzzled and wonders why this man who sings so beautifully on the stage would have to lose his head. However, when she sees the man's dead body from a distance and the blood flowing around, she can sense that something horrible had happened:

> I could not see the Red-coat man; then I noticed a dead body lying on the ground. Beside this there was blood, wetting his red coat. Could it be the blood of that man? Oh, his head had been cut off like the chickens'; I suddenly remembered what Ma Tao had told me some time ago. The Red-coat man was no longer to sing, to speak, and to look proud. He is like the chickens. Why had they done this to such a brave man? As I thought,

> tears filled my eyes. I suddenly pushed Ma Tao's head with all my strength and cried: "Go home, go home!" (Ling, 1969:15-16).

The gravity of the situation described thus through the perspective of a child is not diminished, but it allows Ling Shuhua the grownup to distance herself from the act to give her reader better space to see and judge for himself. Comparing the beheading with a "naughty game" that the officers had played with the Red-coat man, she is concerned whether this game had hurt him. Ma Tao explains that this happened very quickly and therefore the man was unlikely to have felt any pain. The child's feeling of concern, the horror at what she had seen, the inability to understand why all this was done to a man who sang so proudly, add to the readers' experience of this scene. The difference between the child's and the reader's understanding underlines the seriousness of the situation.

Having portrayed an image of a hero-like male convicted, Ling immediately adds a counter female image of a criminal who is the first glimpse of the long row of female images she presents in her narrative. The peculiar thing about Ling's presentation of this female image is that now she is not a child narrator, but recalls this event through what other women had said about the convicted woman. Having learned that there was an upcoming trial of a female criminal who was known throughout the district for her stunning beauty, all the women of the Ling house went to court "to peep behind the wooden screen" (Ling, 1969:18). Ling's father's duty as a mayor of Peking was to act as a judge at the court of final appeal and he was therefore in a position to make a decision about this woman's destiny. Watching the trial together with other women of the household, Ling overhears how they have a hard time believing that such a beauty could have done something as terrible as committing the crime of murdering her own mother-in-law. They watch how this woman explains herself and how Ling's father (kind by nature) almost gives in to her looks and voice:

> "My blue sky lord," the woman prisoner addressed Father as other prisoners did, but her voice seemed so powerful the court became silent suddenly, "to tell you the truth, I am not the person who has killed my mother-in-law, for she had been killing me. …My mother-in-law actually had tried to kill me many times before I killed her. Any one of our neighbourhood could be my witness, all of them have seen how miserable I have been in my house. I work as hard as a cow or a donkey day after day, sometimes even worse than these animals, because they are allowed to meet their husbands, while I …" (Ling, 1969:19).

It is years later that Ling's mother retells this episode and stamps that beauty as a "fox-like woman." In folk literature fox spirits were known for having largely negative effects on men, using their charms to seduce male scholars and even causing their death.[195] Ling portrays her father as one of the many men in popular literature who could not resist a fox spirit's seductive beauty. The

[195] There are a few exceptions to the negative imaging of fox spirits, when they are portrayed not only as exceptionally beautiful, but also as virtuous, intelligent and helpful. For more on this topic see, for example, Wang Kailun (2009).

impact the fox-like woman had on Ling's father and the whole family was just as profound. Ling's mother describes this woman's attempt to mislead the mayor by telling a story in her own defense in such a way that only a fox-like character could do. Saved by his secretaries who "decided not to listen to her" (Ling, 1969:19), the mayor did not postpone her sentence, but this event still had great consequences for him. His honest answer whether he considered the prisoner all that pretty caused a fight between Ling's father and one of his concubines, who Ling calls Fifth Mother. The reader learns of the unbearable pain and humiliation of this woman who, as a consequence of this fight, tried to commit suicide by eating opium. The Fifth Mother was saved, but the episode continued to live in the memory of the entire family.

In such a portrayal of a woman who could have seduced her father with her appearance and voice, Ling adds a folklore tale air to this real-life episode. Fox spirits, although probably unfamiliar to the Western reader as being able to shift shape between animal and human form, can still convey the sense of deviousness and treacherousness.[196] Female beauty, considered as having a destructive effect on male scholars, became even more dangerous if a poor scholar met a seductive fox.[197] Ling Shuhua, describing the almost stupefying effect a beautiful woman has on her father, demonstrates, on the one hand, female power over men, and, on the other hand, people's readiness to use literary female images for the explanation of real-life situations. This fusion of real-life and imaginary female images is something that she as a child can easily relate to and believe in. A bad woman trying to deceive an honorable man with her speech and looks is always a fox-like woman.

Returning to the issue of Ling's employment of a little girl's perspective, there are a few other episodes that are quite illustrative in this regard. In an episode where Ling describes how her father took a new concubine whom she would have to call Sixth Mother, she again assumes a child narrator's perspective. Before the Sixth Mother joined Ling's household, it was the Fifth Mother who was her husband's latest favorite concubine. Unfortunately, she bore him no children and, as Ling's mother was only blessed with daughters, a new concubine was expected to bring the mayor male heirs. It must have been a huge blow to the Fifth Mother's pride, but the reader learns of the feeling of devastation the young woman had felt through the little girl's observing eye. Ling can see

[196] Although Asian narratives in which foxes changed into attractive females and seduced men (Uther, 2006:134) differed to a high degree from the European narratives about foxes which could have both negative and positive connotations, these animals were "attributed negative significance" and considered to be "demonic" already since the early Christian and medieval times (Ibid.,139).

[197] Examples of such interactions between learned men and fox spirits can be found in abundance in, for instance, Pu Songling (2006).

that her Fifth Mother (who was a close friend of her own mother and therefore treated her children kindly) is utterly upset by something, but as a little girl she does not understand what it is that makes the woman cry, although she tries to comfort her as much as she can:

> Fifth Mother seemed to be touched by my simple sympathy. She said slowly: "I'd like to die. I think when one dies, one forgets everything." I could not understand what she meant, but I was afraid that questioning would bore her. I listened to her quietly. After a while I began to feel sad for her (Ling, 1969:62).

The sympathy the little child feels for this grown woman is the sympathy of a grown Ling who now does realize what has caused such pain to her Fifth Mother. However, when she expresses it through the child narrator, the reader begins to sense it more acutely, taken by the apparent sincerity of this little girl who wants to make things right: "'I want to know who has been naughty to you. Tell me, tell me. Oh, you are crying.' I spoke with a quivering voice" (Ling, 1967:63).

While the two unsettling and upsetting episodes discussed above provoke a feeling of sorrow in a little child, the fight that she portrays in the chapter called "A Scene" is looked at with amusement. Portraying the uneasy relationship between concubines in a large elite household like her father's Ling obviously addresses the less attractive side effects of the practice of concubinage. She depicts how some women would fight for the attention of the head of the house, while others, feeling miserable and unhappy, would seek comfort in each other's company. Ling Shuhua observed numerous times how her own mother and the Fifth Mother, the two good friends, would cry together, sharing their feelings with each other. The child narrator is then suddenly complemented by the older Ling who, as a woman, can relate to the kind of sorrows women in the household had experienced. Having miscarried a five month baby boy, Ling's mother was devastated and buckled under the weight of fate which would only allow her to have female children. She would quote a saying "Even a brave hero or a strong man cannot overcome his fate" (Ling, 1969:69). Grown Ling Shuhua comments:

> She always quoted this saying when she talked to Fifth Mother about her new sorrow. When Fifth Mother was melancholy, she came to talk with Mother, and Mother also quoted this to soothe her grief. From these daily talks I learned the meaning of fate in my childhood. I remember now how many times my tears flowed from sympathy while I saw Mother and Fifth Mother weeping over an unseen but powerful force (Ling, 1969:69).

The feeling of sympathy so acutely felt when she tells of events through the perspective of a child is also be sensed in the grown Ling's understanding of what has caused the miserable fate of the women she had shared the roof with. Even the two unpopular "Mothers" receive Ling's sympathy, although on a more subtle level. Spiteful and unpleasant to every other concubine in the house, the Third Mother is portrayed as having a fight with the "new-comer" – the Sixth Mother. Although

portrayed as the jealous and vindictive concubines of the Ling house, the Third Mother and the Sixth Mother are victims of their fate. Comparing their fight to theatre performances which displayed women characters with murderous intentions Ling presents the two concubines wanting to kill each other in their attempt to win the undivided attention of their husband. The child narrator notes: "As I was reminded of the two plays, and felt the two characters more real and more interesting, I watched their quarrel with pleasure" (Ling, 1969:92). Although a child finds such a quarrel almost like a theatre performance, interesting and amusing, the reader realizes that the situation those women had found themselves in was not funny at all. As a child narrator Ling invites her reader to the theatre where the performance is steered according to the old Chinese traditions and where each reader can form his own impressions of what he has seen.

When Ling observes the behavior of women who are suppressed by tradition she does so from a distance, assuming the position of a child narrator who is watching a theatre performance. Whereas when she portrays the beginning of her own journey towards becoming an artist, the child narrator starts playing her own part in the life performance, albeit having to play it according to the rules formulated by men.

From "Neglected Child" to "Little Artist"

I have discussed Ling Shuhua's employment of the narrative mode which foregrounds experiences of her childhood as viewed by a child. Obviously she feels comfortable in this role as she even starts her narrative by reflecting on the sweet taste of memories from her childhood. A line from a poem which opens with: "Things in old days which one recalls as pitiful, all lovable!" (Ling, 1969:11) serves as an opening for the first chapter. She continues:

> I cannot tell how often in my dreams I have pleased myself by being a little girl again, playing in those old places with familiar people. I do not know if they are alive or dead at the present time, and I do not know the names or ages of some of them; but it is all the same, for I like them as they were, not for their names (Ling, 1969:11).

With this poem line Ling Shuhua's indicates that her early years were not all that happy (she reveals this later in her narrative) but this does not prevent her older self from appreciating even the "pitiful" experiences as something precious. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, Ling does not explain why her narrative is focused on her childhood and adolescent years. However, this

period seems to contain some kind of special significance for her. The preface to her collection of short stories might shed some light on this issue.

In the preface to her collection of short stories *Little Brothers* she indicates that her working with childhood memories might have a deeper soul- and self-searching purpose.[198] Admitting that that some of the stories included in the volume are taken from her own past life, Ling confides to the reader that she tends to assign a good deal of significance to events from her childhood. Wearing nostalgic glasses when she looks at the memories from her past, she calls them "fond dreams of her childhood" that contain both joys and sorrows. She uses almost the exact same wording in *Ancient Melodies* talking of the "lovable" dreams of her childhood. She confides that her main goal would be fulfilled if at least some of her readers would go along the same path as her and review and acknowledge some of their old dreams revising in this way one's life purpose. One could therefore suggest that *Ancient Melodies* is not only a few interesting tunes that could catch a Western reader's attention by virtue of their unusual sounds; this narrative is also an attempt at psychological rebirth for a grownup who revisits her old childhood aspirations and ambitions to make the sense of her existence now.

Describing herself as "a quiet girl" and "a good-natured child," Ling Shuhua reflects about her childhood as one of neglect. Being her mother's fourth child and the tenth in the family, she thought that "nobody ever paid any attention to me when I was with grown-ups 'like a little pussy cat in the corner', when I went out quietly Mother always described me as 'a tiny sparrow flying around'" (Ling, 1969:67). In a later chapter Ling again feels necessitated to mention that in her childhood she was naturally neglected:

> I cannot recall that I had ever sat on my mother's or father's knee. My happiest memory of my early childhood was when I was ill. My mother sat on my bed to attend to me, so that I could talk to her and look at her as much as I liked (Ling, 1969:201).

Two times in her narrative she underlines the fact that the neglect she experienced during her childhood was due to her being the fourth child of her mother and the tenth daughter in the family which equaled not being wanted by her parents. She vividly describes how her birth caused many tears to her mother who had desperately wished for a son:

> Mother would have given anything to keep the news a secret as long a possible. With tears in her eyes she implored her maid several times. Chang Ma also repeated with tears: "Don't tell people about the baby coming, that will only make them say she's got one more. …"One more what? (Ling, 1969:68).

[198] See Chen Jianjun (2011).

It is difficult not to feel sympathy for the suffering that a traditional culture that favored boys caused for women who had either daughters or bore no children at all, but what a little child must have felt not receiving the warmth of parental love is absolutely heartbreaking:

> I often felt unhappy when I considered that I was only a girl. I always hesitated to talk or laugh because I was very sensitive about the fact that I was not wanted in my family. When my father knew that I could paint, I suddenly became his favorite child (Ling, 1969:201).

With this Ling illustrates that as a girl one had to be quite exceptional, inheriting some unusual talent to become "visible" for one's parents. It is also quite symbolic that it was not someone from the family that discovered her talent for painting. Such a discourse would have contradicted her earlier claims that she was almost invisible for her parents. Instead it is her father's close friend, Wang Zhulin 王竹林, himself a distinguished court artist,[199] who noticed the drawings that Ling at the age of six got into the habit of drawing on the wall. Impressed by her natural talent, he urged Ling's father to give his little daughter a chance to develop it (Ling, 1969:83).

Surprised and pleased by his daughter's first signs of talent, Ling's father shows initial hesitance and with it the male skeptical attitude towards female talent when he says to his artist friend: "How could that be! My little girl seems to have laid a spell on you. Who could believe that her future work could hold out more promise than yours or mine!" (Ling, 1969:83). However, he is so delighted at this sudden discovery that he assigns his friend to be Ling's teacher on the spot.

Suddenly, becoming her father's favorite child, Ling Shuhua turned into a subject of envy and jealousy of the whole household (except for her siblings, her Mother, and Fifth Mother). In a household where every woman – a concubine or a daughter – would do anything to earn attention from the master of the house, this unexpected talent and unexpected change in his preferences must have been unbearable for the other women:

> My father treated me more kindly than he did my other sisters. When he was tired from entertaining guests, he would have only my Elder Brother and me to supper with him. He did not call even Sixth Mother [the concubine he had taken most recently and favored most] (Ling, 1969:85).

When Wang Zhulin was no longer able to give lessons to Ling Shuhua, he suggested to her father that the little girl should become a pupil of the woman court artist, Mua Su Yun 缪素筠 (1841-1918) (pinyin Miao Suyun)[200] who was highly respectable. Being the only teacher of the late Empress

[199] It was not possible to find any information on this court artist.

[200] For bibliographical information about her, see Chen Yutang (1996:951).

Dowager (1835-1908),[201] she "had won the highest honour at the Court" (Ling, 1969:86). By providing an image of a female court artist in her narrative, Ling Shuhua not only adds yet another female icon to the diversity of images in *Ancient Melodies*, but uses it as a prototype for her own artistic image.

Assuming that this high-ranking woman artist would be too proud to teach a little girl, Ling's father initially hesitated, but agreed to his friend's arguments:

> It does not matter if she does not actually teach her. What I mean is that I wish to send my pupil to her just for the purpose of seeing something and listening to something – in other words, to make her see the life of an artist, not just what the artist does in painting, but everything in her daily life, her manner, her speech, her taste in art, and all her surroundings as well as what she does in painting. Then, even if she can never paint a picture, she would become an artist, and such an artist would never be a commonplace one, I am sure (Ling, 1969:86).

As Ling Shuhua uses these words, spoken by an accomplished male court painter who has authority in such utterances, she gives her reader an insight into what it means to be a real artist. Employing the image of a female artist Ling sees herself as being capable of assuming the same role when grownup. She also demonstrates that a there is a way to greatness for a woman. If discovering a talent in a female child is clearly portrayed as a male prerogative, coming to greatness as an adult does not have to be.

Ling does not reveal how the lessons with her new teacher were administered and what kind of relationship they developed until the very end of her narrative where she is a young woman of about 20 years old. Her cousin Kan Kwang reminds her of the time when he took her as a little girl to pay her first visit to Tutor Mua. Having learned that Ling now wants to pursue a career as a teacher, he advises her to continue painting:

> Your tutor Mua Su Chuang[202] has great hopes that you will be a great artist in the future. Do you know she never praised any of her pupils except you? She used to write to her nephew in Peking asking about your work after she returned to Quen Ming (Ling, 1969:253).

With these words Ling's cousin reminds her of how promising her talent was in childhood bringing her back to "the beautiful dreams of the former time" (Ling, 1969:253) when she was an ambitious pupil and enjoyed the lessons with her tutor. When she portrays herself indirectly through the words of her cousin as the only pupil Tutor Mua had ever praised, Ling at the same time proudly

[201] In the latest book on the Empress Dowager, Jung Chang mentions Lady Miao as becoming so successful at the court that her "reputation as the empress dowager's tutor enabled her to sell her own paintings for high prices, to buy a large house and support her family" (Chang, 2014:177).

[202] Ling Shuhua either misspells or for some other reason quotes a slightly different name this time – Mua Su Chung (Ling, 1969:253) instead of the one she used previously – Mua Su Yun (Ibid., p. 86).

announces her abilities as a very talented painter. She thus positions herself not merely as an artist capable of painting pretty landscapes but as a proud female artist of the highest possible grooming.

The idea of her talent as running in the family and therefore only naturally discovered in her is another important theme in Ling's narrative. Her family background is portrayed as the basis for her future illustrious artistic abilities. Just as Chen Hengzhe proudly brought forth the long tradition of female artists in her family and established her literati roots, so does Ling Shuhua stating that there were very famous male painters and scholars both on her mother's and her father's side. Ling portrays herself as the daughter of an educated mother, who grew up as an adoptive child in one of the wealthiest families and received a proper training, and a prominent father, a Mayor of Peking, who himself was a distinguished painter and calligrapher. These images of exceptional ancestors and parents are portrayed as a means of creating Ling's image as an aristocrat. In the same way as Chen Hengzhe established her intellectual roots, these images of ancestors, construct her own artistic identity.

Constructing her own image through her parents, Ling Shuhua needed to present her mother's image in such a way that it would conform to an overall picture of gentility and scholarly roots in her family background. Hence, her mother is portrayed as having a scholarly background with both her grandfather and father having been educated men.[203] In China learned men never went out of fashion and Ling Shuhua herself obviously also took much pride in her great grandfather who was a scholar and a poet who had "passed the Imperial Examination and became a chu-jen" (Ling, 1969:23).[204] She furthermore establishes that "His life and works were published in The History of Kwantung Province, in which many prominent people – poets, artists, scholars, and officials – were written about" (Ibid., p. 24) by this indicating that this fact can easily be verified. Although Ling Shuhua presents her mother's background first, it is her father's ancestry line which really counts. Thus Ling Shuhua establishes her gentility and the overall scholarly background of her family through her father's figure, a figure that defines everyone else in the household.

Ling Shuhua never mentions her father's real name, Ling Fupeng 凌福彭 (1856-1931), in fact, she even changes his surname to Ding, which is all the reader gets to know about it.

[203] Welland's researched indicates, however, that in reality, Ling's mother was most likely sold to one of the houses of pleasure to become a courtesan (Welland, 2006:43). Both Ling Shuhua and her younger sister Shuhao tried to disguise this fact as too embarrassing: Shuhao would not speak of her mother's origins at all (Welland, 2005:42), while Shuhua gave her mother a more noble image in her narrative. And in 1986 in an interview she indicate that her mother's origins were a highly sensitive issue and therefore she found it necessary to change her mother's rank in the family (Ibid., p.42).
[204] For more on Chinese educational ranks and civil examinations, see Miyazaki (1976).

Nonetheless, Ling's narrative contains so many clues to how to find out more about her father that only a very lazy reader would be content with her describing him as a "Mayor of the capital." The Mayor of Peking was a man with a gentle smile which gave "the prisoners courage to say more in his court than in any other" (Ling, 1969:17). At the end of a trial, he would ask the prisoner a few questions "as familiarly as an old friend" which made minor officers gossip about this "womanly kindness" (Ling, 1969:18). At the point of his proposal to Ju-lan, Ling Shuhua's mother, who is portrayed as living as an adopted daughter with the wealthy Pan family, he was already a very important man in the capital, distinguished for his calligraphy:

> He had been chosen by the Premier, Prince Kong [Gong], to be one of the two First Secretaries immediately after he had passed his Court Examination some years before. It was a great honour to old Mr. Pan to be able to entertain him … It was said that Prince Kong trusted him as his right hand; such a man often got an important post for his next appointment. He was also a very important calligraphist. Many people wanted to ask him to write something to show to their relatives and acquaintances (Ling, 1969:29-30).

Moreover, the Pans were obviously related to Ling Fupeng, as his very distinguished great-grandfather, Xia Libu,[205] a famous painter, was old Mr. Pan's mother's cousin. There is no doubt that later, when it was noticed that Ling Shuhua, as a little girl, showed promise as a skillful painter, it was seen as a matter of course that she, just as her father, had inherited this talent from the famous ancestor.

In her narrative, Ling allows the First Sister, who is Ling Fupeng's first-born child, to make a link between her own artistic talent and the famous painter in the family. In the chapter called "A Plot," when the First Sister comes home for a visit, she is portrayed as being capable of recognizing an artist in little Shuhua at first glance:

> "Are you the artist?" First Sister said, turning to look at me. "I am not at all surprised that you are the artist of the family. You have Father's nose, Father's eyes, and the same shaped face as Father. I am sure that you have also got his talent and his skilful hand for brush-work. What a lucky girl you are! (Ling, 1969:107).

She is obviously very happy and excited on Ling Shuhua's behalf:

> "'Every time I get a letter from Father, I read it again and again until I memorize every word he has written. I remember once he wrote to me about you. He said, 'I am glad to tell you that we have an artist daughter in our family. She paints as well as a grown-up painter, though she has been learning for only a year.' Then he said, 'She must have inherited the talent from your great-grandfather, Hsia Li-pu [Xia Libu]. Once I told the Hsia's cousin about our artist. The next day he sent a collection of Hsia Li-pu's landscape paintings to me to give to your Tenth Sister to show his good wishes. You know this is a priceless family treasure. I would not exchange it for ten thousand pieces of gold'"(Ibid., p. 108).

[205] It was not possible to find information on this male artist. It is noteworthy that a recent translation of *Ancient Melodies* into Chinese (*Gu yun* 古韵 (2011) does not provide the name of this man either. The translator Fu Guangming 傅光明 conveniently omits Xia Libu's name merely calling him "a great artist" (Fu, 2011:63).

While First Sister's first remark on Ling Shuhua's being an artist due to her resemblance to their father must have been intended as flattery for her father, the real praise lies evidently in the comparison with their common famous ancestor's talent. Painting, mostly a male prerogative, is thus presented as something that is available for girls (or women) but only if they have talent for it, and the most important thing is that this talent is inherited from some distinguished male ancestor.

However, becoming an artist meant not only developing painting skills but learning to read and write as well. Therefore, having been "discovered" by her father as a talented child, the question of her education besides painting lessons was raised. Although an obvious talent does distinguish an artist from a scholar, an artist is never fulfilled if not properly educated and knows how to read and write (Ling, 1969:119). On one occasion, when a portfolio of landscape paintings belonging to Xia Libu was delivered to Ling's house (the event mentioned by Ling Fupeng in his letter to his eldest daughter), he took his time to show it to his artist daughter and promised to let her keep this portfolio when she was older. She admits that at that time she was not able to fully appreciate the paintings although she enjoyed looking at them. Her father said:

> "You know, you are very fortunate to own these pictures; you were born lucky, to be connected with such a great artist," he continued with his kind fatherly smile. "Just look at this one, how magnificent his brush-work is, how superb the colour he chooses for the autumn landscape. His whole composition here is lyrical … what a pity that you cannot read half these characters. You should like it more if you could read his writing" (Ling, 1969:116).

Although Ling as a child cannot grasp the exquisiteness of her great grandfather's painting, she uses her father's expertise in this field to introduce Chinese art to the reader and explain the poetic qualities and the elegance of a painting. It seems that at this point Ling Fupeng realized that he could not let his daughter have painting lessons without also letting her learn to read. Having told more about the life of his famous grandfather, he finally says:

> "You are too young to appreciate my grandfather's work, but when you are older you will be able to see what I mean. Your painting tutor Wang is always telling me that I ought to let you go to a tutor to learn to read. This is very important for a painter. Well, I suppose I ought to take you to see Tutor Ben this afternoon" (Ling, 1969:119).

His good intention should not, however, be taken to mean that he had any aspirations that his daughter would be a prominent scholar. The instructions given to Tutor Ben were very clear: "not let her work too hard" (Ling, 1969:121). First, because she still was very little, second, she could not devote herself to studies the whole day, as she had her painting lessons to attend as well. Finally, it could be that Ling Fupeng did not think his daughter needed solid scholarly training, expressing his doubts to the tutor as follows: "I don't expect very much of her; I think a girl like her does not

need to learn much. If she can learn how to compose a short poem on her painting when she wants to, that is quite enough" (Ling, 1969:122). Should Ling Fupeng's attitude towards Shuhua's education be taken as a sign of traditional male superiority? How can it be that he "does not expect very much of her" but still goes to lengths to give her the best teachers who had excelled in painting? I think the answer has more to it than mere male superiority. As Ling Shuhua mentions several times in *Ancient Melodies*, all of her sisters went to school, which must have been one of the new modern (probably even missionary) schools for girls recently established in China.[206] I come to this conclusion because Ling points to the fact that the Confucian classics were no longer taught in schools (Ling, 1969:119).

Allegedly, because she had painting lessons in the afternoon, she could not go to school with her sisters, but stayed home spending time in the garden, or in her mother's room listening to her talk to her Fifth Mother. Thus, morning hours were the only time slot available for her to study. The only child who had a home tutor was Fifth Brother. Since he was a male child traditionally he was to be trained in Confucian Classics and Ling's father "decided to let Fifth Brother study at home" (Ling, 1969:119). When Ling's father finally agreed to let her be taught to read and after his friend Wang Zhulin had several times urged him to take this measure, it was arranged that she would be taught at home by the same tutor as Fifth Brother. By presenting herself as worthy of studying on equal terms with her brother in Confucian classics, Ling Shuhua sends a very powerful message. Not only was she not educated like her other sisters and half-sisters at school where the Confucian Classics no longer were taught; because she showed artistic promise and talent, she was allowed to be educated together with her brother in the classical poems and Confucian writing. This is what her father must have referred to when he "did not expect very much of her," recognizing the common knowledge about how hard it was to memorize Confucian writings and how long it took even distinguished scholars to do that. Nonetheless, the reader can sense the father's overbearing attitude towards his daughter's abilities and perceives a contradictory image of a girl, an aspiring painter, who is allowed to get a glimpse of the "real" scholarly education, but on a girl's premises – a girl should not work too hard.

Just as Chen Hengzhe, who used much effort in establishing the literati background of her family, especially highlighting the long row of female artists in it, Ling Shuhua establishes the aristocratic, scholarly and artistic positions of her own family. She never mentions other female

[206] For more on girls' education in the early twentieth century, see Bailey (2007).

artists in the family, which suggests that she is the first female in her family to have inherited a talent for painting. Unable to build her authority upon female ancestor artists as in Chen Hengzhe's case, Ling portrays her talent as male-based. What is more important, however, is that her talent is also male-discovered and male-blessed. Indeed, it is the father's friend, Wang Zhulin, who notices it. It is the father who allows the cultivation of this talent, and it is the male cousin who reminds Ling of the need for its continuous refinement. When as a young grownup around 1920 she has doubts whether painting is the right occupation during the time when China is in difficulties, it is her cousin's words that Ling Shuhua uses for the justification for the future efforts to pursue this path. When she tells her cousin that she considers painting as only suitable for peace-time, he argues as follows:

> "I cannot agree with you," said he. "I think everyone ought to develop the talent which he was lucky enough to be born with. Besides, painting is useful in some ways. The most important thing for an artist is to bring out the beautiful vision which he sees but the others cannot. It helps us as well as any social reformers. If I were you, I certainly would not give up painting. Perhaps you may study other subjects besides painting, such as literature. That is your subject too, you will enjoy it, I am sure" (Ling, 1969:253).

These words appear at the end of Ling's narrative when she portrays herself as a young woman who had almost given up painting activities considering them unsuitable for the current situation in China. Her cousin's advice to continue painting and perhaps even combine this occupation with study of literature, constitutes as a wake-up call for her. Having thus looked back at her childhood experiences, which she perceives as significant and valuable, Ling realizes that her inner artist can indeed be used for other purposes. Although she owes her role as a true artist to the male figures, she as a grownup narrator is free to use it as she wishes. Defined as a child prodigy, she can now define herself. With the example of *Ancient Melodies*, not only does she show the beautiful vision of old China that "[s]he sees but the others cannot" (Ling, 1969:253) (the others are the Western readers who had only seen or read about the less attractive sides of it), but also manifests her talent as a cultural interpreter through a literary genre, fusing painting and literature in a higher entity. When she claims that she has a deeper knowledge of Chinese culture, that she sees something that "the others cannot," she also seizes the right to become the authority that can interpret it, taking the pouvoir/savoir paradigm to China.

Ling Shuhua, a Cultural Interpreter

Having shown the problematic sides of traditional Chinese culture from the perspective of a child narrator, having portrayed her path towards becoming an artist, Ling assumes the role of cultural interpreter to persuade her reader that the magnificent and glorious sides of the same culture exist as well and should not be overshadowed by the negative impressions. She is convinced that China does not need to reject traditions collected through centuries only to replace them with modern foreign ideas. As a highly cultivated female artist she interprets what she knows best – Chinese traditional culture – by discussing its literature, philosophy, music and education.

When Ling speaks of traditional education, she does not portray it as an absurd memorization of meaningless words as Chen Hengzhe had depicted studies with her father. Instead, she recollects the utterly pleasurable lessons together with her Tutor Ben whose rich voice, chanting beautiful poetry would remain with her forever. Very good at memorizing classical poems, Ling Shuhua retained a memory of them throughout her whole life. She described them as stored in her mind like "gramophone records" (Ling, 1969:123) of her childhood voice mixed with that of her tutor's. This poetry training in her early childhood had indeed added to her general education and taught her to appreciate beauty and rhyme as an artist. She elaborates: "When I look at anything beautiful or am in a poetic mood, I often unconsciously chant the verses I learnt from him [Tutor Ben]" (Ling, 1969:125). Ling Shuhua thus presents an image of herself as more than just a painter, indicating that being well versed in poetry added a new dimension to her life and to her talent as she learned to appreciate how poetry "always suggests new ideas, and gives a wonderful cheerful spirit to face life" (Ling, 1969:125).

In her desire to share some unknown pieces of Chinese literature with her reader, Ling takes on the role of translator and includes into her narrative a few essays and passages that her tutor had chosen for her to study back in her childhood such as a few poems called "To Liu Tsia," "A Newly Married Bride," "Song of the General Li Kwang" (Ling, 1969:125) and a few essays from Song Dynasty (960-1279), as for example "The Bamboo House in Huang Kuang" (Ling, 1969:125-9).[207] She admits that the task of a translator was a difficult one but enjoyable, because it brought her back to those happy days in the company of her tutor (Ling, 1969:125). Referring to the work of a translator as a difficult one, she recognizes the immense effort that task requires, but she does not

[207] For the full list of the poems and essays Ling translated in *Ancient Melodies*, see chapter 9, pp. 125-136.

seem to give it a further thought in terms of how close to the original her translation is and what effects her translation had on the Chinese texts. One of the other reasons that she puts her mind to this endeavor is, as she believes, that these pieces of literature had probably never been translated into English. Hence, when Ling presents literary writings that are dear to her heart and completely unfamiliar to her reader, she takes on the role of a cultural educator who introduces her audience to and teaches it how to appreciate genuine high Chinese literature.

However, Ling also introduces another kind of literature. The popular folk novels which she as a child would find in the room of her Great Uncle became a source of joy and pleasure for her as they did for most "ordinary people in China" (Ling, 1969:146). Ling's Great Uncle, who is portrayed as having quite revolutionary ideas of female equality, introduced her to stories about such a great woman in history as the Tang Empress Wu who was able to reign for sixty peaceful years and improved the position of women in China (Ling, 1969:150). He also told stories about the capable, beautiful and intelligent women who would change into male attire when in danger and who would take to the capital and pass the Court examination (Ibid., p.148). These kinds of stories, incredibly exciting for a child like her, were "full of romance, adventure, and imagination" (Ling, 1969:146). Reflecting on her literary training she writes, "I think the books I studied with Tutor Ben or my elder sisters provided solid nourishment, but these small books were fruit and sweets which brought me joy and high spirits" (Ling, 1969:146). She readily lists the most known books of her childhood, many of which were familiar to the Western reader as well:

> These books were widely known to ordinary people in China in those days. They learned them from operas, drum-songs, story-tellers in tea-houses, or blind men singing in the streets with harps. Nine of ten such stories were chosen from those small books. They included *Three Kingdoms*, *Sui-hu* (*All Men Are Brothers*, translated by Pearl Buck), *Feng Sun Yen Yee*, *Tsing Hua Yuan* (Something similar to *Alice in Wonderland*), *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, *The Monkey* (Translated by Arthur Waley), *Tien-Yu-Hua*, *Pei-Shen-Hua* and *Sze Kung Ann* and *Pung Kung Ann* (Ling, 1969:146).

Ling's role as a cultural interpreter is especially visible in her comparison of a Chinese text to Lewis Carrol's novel *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) or when she points out the texts that had been translated into English by such a well-known writer as Pearl S. Buck or the translator Arthur Waley. With this act she demonstrates that a piece of Chinese culture – some of its literary masterpieces – have already found their way to the Western reader. Moreover, she positions herself as an authority who, just as Buck and Waley, can make a contribution of her own discussing or translating some known and some unknown Chinese literary examples in her autobiography.

Besides the Chinese literature that Ling Shuhua introduces and interprets for her reader, she also dwells on the masterpieces of Chinese music. Positioning herself as a great admirer of traditional Chinese music and the instruments that are used to play it, she expands the depth of her artistic talent which allows her to appreciate this very important artistic form of expression. As a little girl she was introduced to this art form by her adopted parents. The chapter called "My Foster-Parents" portrays a couple described as Ling Fupeng's intimate friends who became Ling Shuhua's foster parents: "My Foster-Parents were both charming people. My Foster-Father was the most talented man and my Foster-Mother the most beautiful woman I ever knew in my childhood" (Ling, 1969:192). Having recently lost their daughter, they were only too happy to accept the little girl as their adopted daughter. The theme of Ling's adoption resonates with the similar theme of Yang Buwei's adoption. While Yang is adopted by her father's childless younger brother, Ling provides a quite different explanation of this obviously very strange tradition of being adopted while one's own parents are alive and in good health:[208]

> By Chinese custom we need not change our surname on adoption. No responsibilities or rights of any sort exist between the adopted parents and the child. All they should do is to make each other happy. The child simply treats his or her adopted parents as intimately as his own parents, and the Foster-Parents show love for their adopted child (Ling, 1969:200).

Ironically, the relationship Ling Shuhua developed with her adopted parents seems so much more loving and giving than that with her real parents. Therefore, in Ling's words, back then she would give anything to visit her Foster-Mother who was genuinely interested in being together with her and offered her all the tenderness and attention she missed at home (Ling, 1969:201).

There was one other reason for this, though. Ling's Foster-Mother was a musician and her artistic temperament charmed and attracted little Shuhua to her. Ling Shuhua thus provides yet another image of a female artist. This image, unlike the one of the woman court artist which was distant and flat, is rich in details and evidently one of Ling's favorites:

> My Foster-Mother did not treat me as other people did. She wanted me to come to see her, but not simply because she wanted someone to keep her company. She taught me to play the seven-stringed harp, and this gave me a good start in Chinese music. She taught me how to appreciate music by telling me interesting stories of the ancient composers. I learned from her to play five compositions which have been well known in China for centuries, but which very few people can play nowadays. I only remember two of them; the tunes of the others I have almost completely forgotten (Ling, 1969:201-2).

[208] Although Chen Hengzhe does not include the images of child-adoption in her autobiography, her own life is a vivid example of how widespread this tradition was in China. See Gimpel (2015) who discusses the adoption of Chen's own children as a friendly gesture (Gimpel, 2015:24 and fn 72).

These lines greatly resonate with the poem by Bo Juyi, the first lines of which Ling used as a metaphoric introduction to *Ancient Melodies* both as a book and as a choice of title. Presenting her own appreciation of music and understanding of what its beauty means to people, Ling Shuhua constantly builds up and adds diversity to her own image as an artist. Her Foster-Mother is one of the people she can thank for gaining this kind of insight into the arts:

> My Foster-Mother often told me that music was the most beautiful way of expressing emotion. Therefore in ancient days all the sages, including Confucius, thought music was very important for everyone. Good music, they believed, was composed only through pure and sincere emotion (Ling, 1969:202).

As Ling's Foster Mother taught her to appreciate the beauty of Chinese music, so does Ling teach her reader to admire the most beautiful ancient melodies of her cultural heritage. Among the pieces of music that she mentions are: "The Flowing Water," "The High Mountain," and "The Fishing Song" (Ling, 1969:202-3). Considering them "the most beautiful pieces of Chinese music" (Ibid., p.203) which are still played in China, Ling introduces them through stories that are connected to the making of or playing of these pieces. A capable musician, Ling's Foster-Mother taught her to play the harp. Ling describes this process not merely as a mechanical memorization of the tones and positions of the fingers on the harp strings but as a creative and intuitive feeling of and with the music piece:

> When she [Foster Mother] taught me to play the harp, she told me to make a picture in my mind before learning the music. For instance, when she taught me "The Wild Geese Alighting on the Sandy Beach," she told me to picture the scene on an autumn night, the moon shining on the sandy beach, gentle winds blowing between the water reeds, and the stream singing sweetly. Imagine, she said, the geese resting on the sand and enjoying themselves (Ling, 1969:204-5).

Demonstrating the aesthetics of Chinese traditional music and its impact on people's life, Ling is determined to show all the beauty of Chinese culture and in this way to influence her reader. It seems that she is trying to say that something that is old and seems to be stiff can also contain or allow great creativity. Having addressed the most beautiful aspects of Chinese culture – painting, literature and music – the aspects that she got a taste of in her early childhood - Ling Shuhua also introduces Chinese philosophy, an aspect that she learned to appreciate later when growing older.

Describing her school life at Girls' Normal School, which she started attending together with her sister Mei in 1921, Ling portrays a teacher, Mr. Chang, who introduced her to the great Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi 庄子 (369-286 B.C.) and said that studying this ancient philosopher will help her "to think freely" (Ling, 1969:240). This teacher not only saw a literary talent in her, but was also convinced that she was "one of my pupils who has the talent to appreciate Chuang

Tze" (Ling, 1969:238). As Ling goes on studying the book of Zhuangzi's writings, she notices that a certain change in her perception of the world is beginning to occur:

> I began to be able to see the beauty in things without form and color. I could see my dreams in daylight. I used to sit for hours and hours thinking of ideas that had never occurred to me before (Ling, 1969:138-9).

Ling's commentaries on Chinese philosophy demonstrate that, just as other elements of Chinese culture that she has portrayed for her reader, studying philosophy is capable of changing a person's perception of the world and its beauty. Furthermore, she is also demonstrating that one cannot judge something well until one has mastered it, and that, with mastery, there comes creativity, vision and freedom. This teacher, exerting much influence on his students, seems to have had quite an impact on Ling. The nostalgia for the old traditional values of Chinese culture that can be sensed in her narrative could very well originate from the kind of words she had heard her teacher say:

> "I despise the so-called 'civilized nations today,' said Mr. Chang. "It appears to me that after the Boxer war they suddenly discovered China as an uncivilized country. Some of our young men who returned from the West often boast of what they have seen and studied abroad, and they even begin to look down on everything Chinese. To their minds, even the moon would look more lovely in Europe or America than the one we see here. I don't blame them if they only admire their success in the scientific world, but I cannot see what is in their minds when they praise their philosophy and literature" (Ling, 1969:236).

Clearly meant as a resolute message for her Western readers, Ling's argument is meant to underline that China and its culture do have their own proud traditions in literature, philosophy, music and painting and do not need a foreign substitution for them. Ling Shuhua employs Mr. Chang's ideas to argue that the Chinese should cherish their own ancestors and their achievements instead of neglecting them. Through her teacher's words she states:

> "We have had our own philosophers, haven't we? We have several great ones, such as Confucius, Mencius, Lao Tze, Chuang Tse, and Mo Tze, and a number of smaller ones. Why should we hide them? We ought to be proud of our own ancestors and remember what they achieved, and not neglect them" (Ling, 1969:236).

As a true artist, Ling Shuhua positions herself as a great connoisseur and admirer of traditionally rich and beautiful aspects of Chinese culture. She therefore feels entitled by the position of an artist to pass this knowledge on to the Western reader in order to break down the stereotypical vision of China in the West and show the inherent potential of traditional cultural activities.

Ling Shuhua's *Ancient Melodies* is an example of a tremendous and a very ambitious effort to interpret Chinese culture for the English reader. In it she assumes the role of an artist which in Pearson and Pope's terms is a heroic masculine role. Ling does not hide the fact that she was "helped" on the way towards this position by the strong male figures of her childhood and adolescence. However, the interpretation project of Chinese culture for the West is her statement

that she is now an artist in her own right. When introducing aspects of her cultural heritage, Ling is not blind to her native culture's uglier sides. However, as an artist, she chooses not to voice her criticism of those aspects out loud as Chen Hengzhe had done in her autobiography. By adopting the narrative voice of a child Ling uses the textual space in a much more discreet way than Chen presenting disturbing images of women. Carefully constructed and masterfully presented through her narration, these images introduce the Western reader to such distinct features of Chinese culture as the institution of marriage, tradition of concubinage and the effects of these traditions on people. Alongside these images she demonstrates her own place in this world, growing up as the anonymous female child number ten and being transformed into the artist daughter of the family. Portraying her journey towards the position of an artist, she collects all the magnificent effects of Chinese culture on her way gently pushing her reader to the extraordinary discoveries of its grandeur and beauty.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I take as my subject of academic study three early twentieth-century Chinese women writers' autobiographies. By taking a new critical approach this inquiry fills a gap in studies that have theorized Chinese autobiography so far. While earlier studies solely engaged in tasks of genre definition or gender questions, I encompass all of their most important findings under a new critical umbrella of narrative theory and examine the self-images that Chinese women writers constructed in the stories about their lives. Narrative theory here encompasses Baker's term of narrative framing as means of analyzing how those in positions of power and knowledge formulate certain images of the weaker ones and label them into stereotypes; Fisher's view of narrative as means of communication and Abbot's approach to narrative as a story told within a certain narrative discourse.

I limit my study only to a very small group of writers who wrote their narratives in English: These include Chen Hengzhe's *Autobiography of a Chinese Young Girl*, Yang Buwei's *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman* and Ling Shuhua's *Ancient Melodies*. Taking these texts' potential for cross-cultural communication as a starting point, I view their authors as cultural ambassadors of China to the West and examine the images of themselves and of Chinese women in general that they communicated in a surprisingly authoritative manner through their autobiographies. These women's autobiographies deserve particular attention as they represent the first unique attempts of Chinese writers to influence Western perception of China and formulate a modern Chinese female identity. The fact that these first attempts were made by Chinese women of the beginning of the 20th century make them even more special.

Among the results of this study are insights into how these women writers acquired their own female voice in the world of literature dominated by male language and how writing in English may have facilitated this; how they envisaged their womanhood giving them a unique right to represent themselves on their own premises; how they changed the *pouvoir-savoir* paradigm (which suggests skewed balance of power in favor of those with knowledge) through using the transformative space of autobiography – a new genre that opened up new avenues of self-presentation and representation and became a space of creative friction that affected both sides of the encounter. The mode they chose was not necessarily revolutionary in that it was a complete moving-away from older/traditional forms of female representation; it was a blending of the old and the new, an attempt to enlarge the boundaries of female (their own and others) life trajectories and,

at the same time, to present an image of the Chinese world that would help or encourage foreign readers to relinquish some of their stereotypical views and vocabularies. In doing so they positioned themselves not only as heroines, or in other words, passive female characters, but also as heroes, as active creators of their own stories. It is through portraying themselves in heroic terms that Chinese women writers conveyed their own hidden authority as narrators. They showed that they were not content with being described by others and therefore consciously chose to actively define themselves in their own autobiographies. By assigning value to themselves as storytellers they assumed enormous power.

Prior to Chinese women's experimenting with the genre of autobiography, they were already experimenting with fiction. The themes that became the hallmarks of female fiction concerned the difficult aspects of the female self. Writing about female problems, women authors portrayed common dilemmas they found themselves facing in the rapidly changing China at the end of the Qing dynasty. Examples of such writing can be found in the works of the authors whose autobiographies I have studied in this dissertation. Hence, prior to writing her self-narrative, Ling Shuhua was a well-known short story writer and was often referred to as the Chinese Catherine Mansfield. Even Yang Buwei, who had not been a trained writer, attempted to write a novel based on the events of her life as early as in 1913. Other contemporaries had also shown their active desire to act and write literature from a woman's position and perspective and with the determination to show the worth of their literary products. Among these women was Ding Ling who already in 1928 with the publication "Miss Sophia's Diary" depicted the sexual longings of a young woman in a very straightforward and unapologizing way. This was an extremely provocative piece of fiction in which she pursued an idea to show "how women naturally act" (Barlow and Bjorge, 1989:26). Chen Hengzhe's 1929 publication, "The Yangtze River and the Grand Canal," reads almost as a response to Ding Ling's provocative piece. In the staged conversation between the two waterways Chen portrays the raw and uncompromising power of the natural stream as compared to the controlled and disciplined subordination of the man-made torrent. The reader senses Chen's sympathy with the Yangze, which acts naturally, just as a woman might and should. Her objections are against the submissive nature of the Grand Canal which is content with the role that has been assigned to it. This metaphor, if taken further, might even be viewed through the prism of Pearson and Pope's female heroine and female hero. The Grand Canal, shaped by others, takes the role of always be being the passive and submissive heroine while the Yangze River, on the other hand, violent and uncompromising, daring and provocative, finds its way through difficulties and obstacles in the

manner of a hero who takes off on a journey and actively fights the world and comes out as a winner. Female agency, expressed through these symbolic literary pieces, was made possible by the historic circumstances, facilitated by Chinese male intellectuals and inspired by Western influences. In their attempts to express themselves, female writers experimented with different genres of writing including autobiography. In it they presented themselves as advisors transforming the act of self-writing from Rousseau's confessionist tones into their own cross-cultural interpretation of Chinese women and China. In all of this, these women recaptured, celebrated or invented the personae they were or wanted to be. They spoke to the world outside China, acting on behalf of their nation, and with assertion of their right to voice their concerns.

The palette of stereotypical views prevalent in the West as a result of the long and complex cultural and historical encounters between China and the West were bound to provoke a reaction from the Chinese themselves at some point. By the twentieth century, more and more Chinese writers, among them also women writers, felt an urge to change and refine the negative Western stereotyping by writing their own "authentic" accounts of their country. Although this dissertation is, by no means, the first to examine this phenomenon, my approach in applying notions of narrative theory allowed a view of autobiographies first and foremost as narratives or stories (told by people and for people) that can transport ideas and images across countries' boundaries. Walter Fisher's view of narration as a means of communication between people allowed approaching autobiography in terms of its ability not only to reevaluate its author's internal communication of an earlier self through the later self, but also in terms of its ability to create external communication between the author and the reader. All three female writers studied here demonstrated their ability to reflect upon their younger selves and renegotiate the positions they used to occupy. For example, Chen Hengzhe's idealistic view of herself as a young revolutionary and warrior, Joan of Arc-like, changed drastically when she, a few years older, realized that a female warrior does not necessarily have to be physically violent, but can fight with her paper and pen in a much more dignified fashion. As for the external communication that narration can establish between autobiographers and their readership, one can argue that it enabled or facilitated a dialogue between Chinese and Western cultures, a possibility of transmitting cultural images, and finding the threads of commonality between the cultures of China and the West. Yang Buwei in particular took the idea of dialogue to decisively new heights when she wrote her autobiography as a conversation between herself and her husband, between author and translator, between author and reader. Involving her readers in a

conversation about her experiences, she shared her observations of the differences and similarities between Chinese and Western ways of living.

One of the hypotheses of this study was that Chinese women writers, besides making their narratives available in the language of the readership, would also attempt to communicate their ideas by utilizing the stereotypical imagery that their reader was familiar with, even those that refer to the less attractive sides of the customs and traditions that foreigners had observed in Chinese society and labeled as negative such as footbinding, the tradition of arranged marriage, oppression of women and so on. The theoretical category of narrative framing proved to be a valuable tool in outlining the processes that led to such selective stereotyping and labeling. A historical overview of Western perceptions of China showed that these perceptions were ever changing and, when Western travelers chose to portray China either in a positive or negative light, they created images that suited Western needs and stereotyped China into clichéd vocabulary. By this controlled representation of China's images Westerners demonstrated their power and cultural dominance. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, Chinese intellectuals, male and female, took decisive action to reverse the *pouvoir/savoir* paradigm and assume authoritative voices that could represent their nation. They envisaged themselves as cultural ambassadors and attempted to turn this skewed relationship in their favor. While performing this role they found it necessary to operate with the Western stereotypical perceptions of China and offer their own and, in the case of the woman writers discussed here, unique female perspective on unfavorable Western views.

Female autobiographers all addressed the issues that were troubling the minds of Western readers. However, they each dealt with them in their own fashion. While addressing traditional institutions, describing, criticizing or merely observing them, they were very particular in selecting which ones they wanted to present for their readers. Hence, while Yang Buwei dismissed the practice of concubinage as non-existent in her family, Ling Shuhua's whole narrative evolves around the social life of the concubine women in her family. However, the practice of binding female feet, addressed with such zeal by Chen Hengzhe, is treated only briefly in Yang's narrative, while Ling Shuhua never mentions it at all. Such omissions in description of some practices and inclusion of others point to the fact that they were conscious choices on the part of the authors. These choices were to aid in the construction and representation of certain images and in conveying them to their readers in a certain way. This "selective appropriation" of images, that according to Baker one of the criteria of successful framing, enabled them to plot their stories in a particular way.

But this selective appropriation did not only apply to the range of available images of China and its women in the West. It applied to domestic images or stereotypes as well. The women writers were invariably shaped and affected by the way domestic female images were defined in Chinese literature. On testing a range of Chinese female literary roles against the classification of female literary images suggested by Pearson and Pope, it became clear that it could not encompass all the manifestations of Chinese women's roles and needed expanding. However, the basic division of Pearson and Pope's classification into heroine roles and hero roles gave a more nuanced insight into how women autobiographers juggled with and mixed roles that were prescribed for them by society and roles that they envisaged for themselves. The highly valued roles of daughters, mothers and wives in Chinese society (according to Pearson and Pope, virgins, mistresses and helpmates) were bound to find their way into female autobiography since the canonical Confucian texts allotted women roles of heroines in accordance with their position within the family unit. These are the typical heroine roles that reflect female characteristics in a literary text and indicate submissiveness, passivity, obedience and virtuousness. However, the transformative space of autobiography allowed the inclusion of other kinds of female roles, ones that possess male characteristics such as talent, wisdom, adventurousness, courage and leadership and are labeled as hero roles. In Pearson and Pope's classification these roles are reflected through the characteristic traits of sage, artist and warrior. These roles manifest themselves, as Pearson and Pope have argued, when women cease being described by men and decide to use textual space to define their character on their own. My hypothesis that suggested active female agency through the genre of autobiography would appear to hold. Chinese women writers' self-representation and definition not only as traditional womanly heroines but also as heroes indeed made their portraits versatile, trustworthy and authoritative. Brought up with the values of traditional female obedience and submissiveness, Chinese women were nonetheless exposed to a rich variety of female roles through trivial literature that had a great variety of female roles characterized by their masculine qualities. Although these roles were not intended to become role models for Chinese women in traditional China, in the beginning of the twentieth century they became an inspirational source for female self-expression. This period thus witnessed not only a release of heroic qualities from the literary domain into the lives of flesh and blood Chinese women but also the emergence of a genre of autobiography. This genre became a new "transformative space," or, in Massey's words, a place of "meeting-up of histories" (cited in Gimpel, 2015:6) where women, having received Hu Shi's "blessing," could acquire a new sense of authority and portray their selves exactly through the appropriation of these masculine roles. In their

narratives, the Chinese women showed more creativity in choosing their images than Pearson and Pope's list or the images made available in national registers because they were living at a moment that seemed to offer the spaces of activity such as interaction with foreigners or equal education with men and gave them a view of possibilities that previously were unthinkable, even in fiction.

Together, the female autobiographies studied in this dissertation presented an enormous scope of female images enriching and diversifying foreign perceptions of Chinese life and Chinese women. Compared to each other, however, these narratives are characterized by quite different tactics in employing those images and revealing important traits of the writers' own personalities. Chen Hengzhe reserves traditional female heroines for her family members and close relatives, while for herself she envisages the heroic role of a scholar-warrior. Although her female relatives exhibit the potential for the manifestation of male characteristics – her mother is portrayed as a capable artist and her aunt as a talented woman and born leader – Chen's traditional heroines are constrained by the old Chinese institutions of big family and arranged marriage. Ling Shuhua's narrative introduces the most varied representation of female images from all walks of life. Employing images that were available to her in childhood, either real-life or fictional, she demonstrated the richness and diversity of Chinese life and culture. Among those images are the female fox spirit, female painter, rebellious youth, the glorious image of the Tang dynasty queen, poor working-class children, businesswomen and others. It is noteworthy that this rich imagery-range is reserved for the description of traditional China and its literature. For herself Ling secures the hero role of an artist. This role comes not only with talent for painting, but also with the ability to appreciate all other forms of art such as music and literature. In Yang Buwei's autobiography, the reader encounters just as rich and varied a selection of female images and roles, yet the difference in Yang's approach is that she portrays herself in all of those roles. She can be compared to a chameleon that changes color in any given situation in life. Compared to Yang's image/images of a personality with an innate ability to change, transform and adapt her roles and functions to the life around her, the images of the scholar Chen Hengzhe and the artist Ling Shuhua appear somewhat stiff and constricted.

Written (or translated into English) by women with similar social and educational backgrounds in the years before, during, and after World War II, these three autobiographies could not be more different in their ways of addressing the reader and constructing self-images. Each of these women writers experimented with the genre of autobiography which allowed them more

freedom and flexibility than other literary genres that required more fixed and rigid forms of expression. The remarkable thing, however, is the way each of these narratives approached the task of portraying "authentic" images of China through the prism of what each of them thought an authentic Chinese woman was.

Chen Hengzhe as the woman scholar very carefully constructed her scholarly image on the background of the literati roots of her family. Staging her early years as an eager pursuit for education, from the position of an older woman, she demonstrates her ascent towards greatness. Chen's portrayal of her hard life-journey and her achievements which, as she makes it clear, were possible due to her personal characteristics such as intelligence and adventurousness, allowed her to view and position herself as an authority who can warn against the revival of the old cultural institutions under which so many of her family members had suffered. Chen's China is a China of contrasts. It is depicted as old and traditional through the portrayal of the older generation and, at the same time, it is characterized as young and modern through the portrayal of her younger self – through rejection of the old traditions and her search for education. A historian and a scholar, Chen is also an educator, as there is no doubt that the purpose of her autobiography is a pedagogical one: she is eager to remind young people not to make the mistakes of the past. Her autobiography adds at least two more categories to Pearson and Pope's classification of female literary heroes: a scholar and an educator. It is noteworthy that both these roles, which are authoritative and commanding, underline the monological nature of Chen's narrative. Although she envisages herself as a cultural interpreter between two cultures, the instructive tone of her voice prevents her reader from objecting to Chen's authority as a scholar. Chen is not opening a space for dialogue; she is attempting to fill an old space with a new narrative.

If Chen Hengzhe only attempts to demonstrate how she became a person who is in control of her own life and destiny and therefore can give advice to humanity, the autobiographer who actually succeeds in taking control over her life is Yang Buwei. Chen's autobiography ends with picturing herself on her way to America, 24 years old, her life and career ahead of her. Apart from Chen's brief mentioning of herself becoming the first female professor at Beijing University, her reader never learns about her becoming a scholar, a historian, an active participant in intellectual discussions of her time. The idea of *zaoming* or shaping her own life somewhat falls apart, as she never provides enough support to this philosophy in her autobiography.[209] Yang Buwei, however,

[209] For a thorough study of Chen's philosophy of *zaoming*, see Gimpel (2015:73-6).

without even mentioning any vague ideas about a person's own responsibility for the course of his/her life, demonstrates by her actions that she is exactly the person who is capable of such behavior. Close analysis of her autobiography provides an insight into the manner a "typical Chinese woman," as Yang Buwei defined herself, took responsibility for her life. Exposed to many similar life situations as Chen Hengzhe – the prospect of arranged marriage, revolutions, studies abroad, the beginnings of a professional career, marriage and hard decisions about the choices between career and family, Yang Buwei included them all in her autobiography. Her frankness and openness about intimate details of her personal life do not diminish the authority of her narration, an authority Chen Hengzhe might have been afraid to lose, had she described her life after her American training.[210] Yang's atypical portrait of a strong "typical Chinese woman" includes the varied range of roles that she had played through her life. Perhaps it is all of these roles – both the more traditional (mother and wife) and the more modern ones (school principal, doctor, traveler, writer and so on) that make her self-image appear accomplished and resting in itself. However, even such a well-balanced person as Yang Buwei was necessitated to lean against strong male supporting images of her grandfather, father and husband to derive the strength for her own authority. Yang's narrative appears truly dialogical in its mode of addressing and interpreting Chinese and Western cultures for each other.

Finally, a close reading of Ling Shuhua's self-narrative revealed her attempt to position herself as an artist. A male role according to Pearson and Pope's classification, the role of the artist is constructed with delicate refinement. Ling Shuhua, in the same manner as Chen Hengzhe, uses her family's artistic roots to build a solid fundament for presenting her own talent. Her narrative is rather different from the previous two autobiographies in the form of its presentation. While progressing with Ling's story the reader slowly sinks into an almost fantasy world told through a child's perspective and with a grownup's insight. A child's perspective allowed her more freedom in choosing what events to tell and how to tell about them. At the same time, the child's perspective on narration in a way legitimized some factual inaccuracies that sneaked into her narrative, as children are not expected to remember and understand what happens around them in the same way as adults. The China that Ling Shuhua interprets for her foreign audience has many sides, both ugly ones, depicting the devastating effects of arranged marriages and concubinage, and beautiful ones – its literature, philosophy, painting and music. Ling's own self-portrait is of a refined and non-

[210] For a discussion of Chen Hengzhe's attempts at keeping her authority as female scholar in spite of her pregnancies and her duties as mother, see Gimpel (2015: chapter 1).

judgmental observer of her own culture, while her autobiography is like a theatre play which, through its sophisticated expression, projects a story of her life for the audience and thus provides them with a greater range of images.

Summing up the powerful messages that each woman autobiographer intended to send out to the world it can be said that Chen Hengzhe wrote a didactic autobiography where she used her authority as an intellectual to provide almost academic explanations of China's customs and traditions. Yang Buwei wrote a more conventional autobiography which portrays the evolvement of her versatile and robust personality with China as a background, while Ling Shuhua, using her authority as an artist, produced an artistic autobiography portraying old China as a world which no longer existed but which is captured on the canvas of her autobiography. However, no matter how differently these women positioned themselves, all of them can be viewed as role models and true representatives of new/modern Chinese women not only for the Chinese themselves and the domestic readers of the Chinese versions of their texts, but for Western women as well. The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed tremendous changes in the life of women in the West: the right to vote, the right to education and career. All these issues were very similar to the struggles of Chinese women during the same period. Therefore these autobiographies and the strong personalities they represented, personalities with authority behind their words, could very well become inspirational sources for Western women.

Having taken on roles of cultural interpreters, Chen Hengzhe, Yang Buwei and Ling Shuhua instruct and explain, expose and entertain, or leave it up to the reader to interpret the exquisite brush strokes of life images in China. The positions from which they saw and portrayed themselves were somewhere in between tradition and modernity, their roots belonging to the former and their longings affiliated with the latter. Women in transition, having a unique insight into China's past and present, these writers can be considered as some of the best spokespersons who could guide their readers through a monumental transformation that was taking place in China following the fall of the last Chinese dynasty. However, the fact that these autobiographies came into being encouraged and helped on the way by influential Western friends, still shifts the *pouvoir/savoir* relationship towards the West. Hence, although these autobiographies were unprecedented and exemplary, they were written on Western premises. Perhaps, when pursuing the goal, essentially a pedagogical one, to foster mutual understanding between the peoples of China and the English-speaking world, Chinese women understood how to balance this power relationship for the benefit

of both parts. They acknowledged the power of the West and supplemented its ideas about China with their own knowledge. Employing the transformative space of the autobiographical genre they communicated across boundaries of race, class and culture and presented convincing stories designed to provoke sympathy and identification in their Western readers.

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